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The Impact of Family, Community, and Resilience on African-American Young Adults Who Had Parents Incarcerated During Childhood

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND RESILIENCE ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAD PARENTS INCARCERATED DURING CHILDHOOD

by

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Chair: Sylvia Gonzalez

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: THE IMPACT OF FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND RESILIENCE ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAD PARENTS INCARCERATED DURING CHILDHOOD

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Problem

Parental incarceration affects millions of children, and their numbers continue to rise. By losing their parents, children can be exposed to unique risks, relative to the separation. Many children face family structure disintegration, and this can be so disruptive that their normal development is impaired. Evidence suggests that children are impacted psychologically, socially, and financially. The result is the display of problematic behavior, being aggressive or withdrawn at home and in their communities. The concentration of the incarceration trends seems to be in poor African-American communities. Incarceration has left higher numbers of children without parents, making the collateral damage greater.

Method

This research was designed as a qualitative, multiple-case study. It addressed the questions: How do African-American young adults describe the impact of parental incarceration on their lives, and how were they able to overcome the difficult situation and graduate from high school? This qualitative study used data from semi-structured interviews as a means to explore the lives of the African-American young adults who experienced parental incarceration during childhood. Twelve individuals (18 years or older) participated in the interviews. The real-life social context was covered in depth and scope for each case under study. Their rich cases identified the underlying issues that surfaced in their lives. All the cases were addressed through the home, school, and community environments, utilizing the participants' voices and perspectives. Participants were selected by referrals from a diverse group of professionals. Each young person volunteered to participate in this project.

Results

The results of this study indicate that the African-American young adults shared similar experiences regardless of slight variations in the risks and adverse conditions within their homes. The 12 individuals were connected by the common thread of parental incarceration that exposed them to negative consequences. Their responses determined that the following findings were most critical: (a) family system, (b) local community, and (c) their own personal strengths.

Family bonds were strong. The participants sought support and received it from aunts, uncles, brothers, and cousins. Not one child entered foster care during the father's imprisonment. Mothers and/or grandmothers were the primary caregivers.

Grandmothers became surrogate parents when a significant number of mothers worked multiple jobs, attended school or needed time to regain balance in their lives.

The church was the place where the children found normalcy, acceptance, purpose, stability, safety, father figures and the absence of judgments because of their fathers. In the majority of cases, it was grandmothers who introduced them to church influences.

School gave meaningful support and became a refuge for the 12 children. This is where they felt safe and free from the anxieties of their home environments. These children received inspiration and encouragement from administrators and teachers who pushed and challenged them to achieve academic success.

Key supportive relationships and the act of *telling* their stories with candor reinforced their resiliency, completed their past, and inspired them in their pursuit of a successful adult life.

Conclusion

African-American young children, who were exposed to parental incarceration during their childhood, were able to become resilient in spite of their adverse circumstances due to a strong family support system, and a caring community in their schools and churches. Their own individual strengths were also crucial in their development as good society members.

Andrews University

School of Education

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Marilyn Diana Ming

July 2011

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to the 12 resilient African-American young adults who were courageous enough to allow me access to their lives and trusted me to use their stories to confirm that there is no one pathway to resilience. In the retelling of their stories, a lifeline possibly could emerge for other children who are non-resilient. They are amazing, strong, independent, spiritually grounded individuals who are aware of what it took to self-right. To be willing to return to a time when their companions were fear and confusion, they have my utmost gratitude. Their raw stories serve as a catalyst for change. Through their perspectives and insights, they have made this study relevant. The 12 young people are the heroes of this study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Incarceration in the United States is really a large issue. It is believed that millions of children are impacted and they "often come from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of society" (Robertson, 2007, p. 8; see also Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). For over three decades, the national trend has been to favor imprisonment for the simplest of crimes. This practice has guaranteed that children's lives will be disrupted because most of the adults in the prison system are parents (Johnson, 2007). Existing research suggests that imprisoning parents on such a large scale may affect the next generation of children by contributing to their engagement in antisocial and delinquent behavior (Justice Center, 2008; Lengyel & Harris, 2003; Reed & Reed, 1997; Simmons, 2000). Due to the dramatic growth in the number of parents imprisoned, children have been referred to in some quarters as the "orphans of justice and innocent victims of punishment" (Johnson, 2007, p. 2).

Despite the enormity of the increased numbers of children affected, accurate details and exact figures for these children are unavailable (Robertson, 2007). Existing literature indicates that a lot of the current information about the children of incarcerated parents was generated from imprisoned parents, caregivers, and others but rarely from children (Johnston, 1995a; Seymour, 2001; Ziebert, 2006). For decades, several studies

have employed this method of gathering information and, due to the incomplete picture, the information has been weak in details. Therefore, many studies turned to the U.S. Department of Justice statisticians' prison survey reports (Gabel, 1992; Johnson, 2007; Seymour, 1998; Simmons, 2000). There are few studies focusing on the children's pathways over long periods of their childhood as they experienced parental incarceration (Gabel, 1992; Poehlmann, 2005). In the past, sociology policy studies on children (Seymour, 2001) shed light on what is known that impacted other studies. For example, she writes:

> Law enforcement does not gather information about the children of arrested adults and correctional institutions do not ask prisoners for specific information about their children. Because there is no specific agency or system charged with collecting data about this population, it is unclear how many children are affected. (p. 2)

Parental incarceration is a multifaceted and complex issue because it involves children and much guessing about their real experiences (Y. Harris, Graham, & Carpenter, 2010; Poehlmann, 2005). It is often believed that incarceration rips apart the child/parent attachments, fractures the family structure, breaks down the community cohesiveness, and isolates the innocent children from the wider society (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Travis, Cincotta, & Solomon, 2003). On any given day, nearly 10 million minor children have a parent "entangled in the American legal system" under criminal justice supervision, either incarcerated, on probation, or on parole (Griess, 2007, p. 2; see also Arditti, 2005; Hairston, 2003; Martone, 2005). Of these children, approximately 2.7 million wake each day with one or both parents in jail or prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mauer, Nellis, & Schirmir, 2009; Pew Charitable Trust, 2010). Existing literature suggests that an estimated 1.5 million children at some period of their lives have experienced at least one parent incarcerated (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007).

Although the directions of studies have led to looking at the problem and the family structures, the research still has been superficial and lacking in understanding (Hairston, 2001, 2002). Some social science researchers point out how crucial it is to understand how parental incarceration may affect minor children's development. African-American parents make up the largest number inside both state and federal facilities (Mumola, 2000). Thus, more African-American children are introduced to the prison system, and past studies have predicted that the problem of having an incarcerated parent possibly can be linked to isolation, maladjustment, and aggressive behavior that led to law-breaking (Hairston, 2001; Lengyel & Harris, 2003; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002; Virginia Commission on Youth, 2002). Imprisonment has become almost commonplace in many communities, challenging family stability, community unity, and choices (National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, 2008; Seymour, 2001).

As recent as 2007, research findings suggested that African-American children lose their parents (1 in 15) to prisons or local jails in greater numbers than other races, such as White (1 in 111) and Latino (1 in 42) children (Mauer et al., 2009). A special report released from the Bureau of Justice Statistics stated that African-American children were seven and a half times more likely than their White counterparts to experience separation from at least one parent due to incarceration. The statistical report also reflected upon what is believed to be a fact that 1 in 8 goes to sleep each night cut off from a parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Wildeman (2009) is among a small group of researchers that have voiced alarm at what they are now uncovering. Through his investigation, Christopher Wildeman found that one in five African-American children

born in 1990 have experienced the trauma of having one parent incarcerated before the celebration of a ninth birthday. Other researchers present even worse news. They insist that one in three Black males born today will go to prison sometime over his lifespan (Bonczar, 2003; Mauer & King, 2007). However, the empirical evidence is just not there to support their claim (Y. Harris et al., 2010).

With the multiple ways that African-American children can be affected, researchers concede that little is known about their reality, regarding the impact that one or multiple incarceration situations has on their lives (Johnston, 1995c; Seymour, 1998). According to the Council on Crime and Justice (2006), African-American children most likely suffer the harshest consequences. They tend to come from urban, poor neighborhoods and have parents with little education (Wildeman, 2009). The assault on their happiness and normal development becomes part of the collateral damage within families.

There is a growing awareness and interest by researchers in addressing the impact of parental incarceration on children in a more significant way (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). What children of prisoners need and how best to help them is the challenge. Some researchers have begun to reframe questions in the field, but there still is limited information that comes directly from the children (Bouchet, 2008). The first area of inquiry is the suffering experience through the physical separation from parents (Hairston, 2007). The U.S. Bureau of Justice Department's statistical data indicate that for most minor children, it is the fathers (91%) who account for patterns of incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The age at which the parent/child separation occurs is believed to be a significant contributor in how the children identify with the incarcerated

parents and how they fare (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002; Simmons, 2000). Sometimes, the impact of parental incarceration is so severe on children that it damages their health (Willmott & van Olphen, 2005).

The reports suggest that the loss of fathers often leaves children to experience permanent rifts in parent/child relationships, or sometimes relief from abuse or neglect (Johnson, 2007). The impact on children if their mothers are incarcerated is formidable because, more often than not, they are the custodial parents. The effects are immediate and long-term (Mumola, 2000; Philips & Gleeson, 2007). Many children are affected by their absence. What is worse, at least half of the children are under 10 years old (Mauer et al., 2009). We are reminded by Ziebert (2006), Adalist-Estrin and Mustin (2003), Seymour (2001), and Kampfner (1995) that the loss of a parent to prison is traumatic to children. Some grieve as if the parent were dead. Some children mourn the absence of the physical presence of the person who cared for them. Others mourn being denied a normal, nurturing home.

The second area of inquiry is the psychological and emotional stress brought on by parental incarceration. Historically, children often are overlooked when a parent is arrested. The reports describe another failure to safeguard this already high-risk population. One in every five minor children witnesses his or her parent's arrest, and almost 30% of them are confronted with drawn weapons. Those who do not witness the arrest often fabricate much worse ideas about their parent's fate (Kampfner, 1995). Existing problems are magnified after some children are witnesses to such scenes. The trauma of seeing mothers arrested induces new problems, causing a series of crises. For example, the continuous concern for their mothers and themselves seems to bring on

post-traumatic stress syndrome (Kampfner, 1995; Seymour, 1998; Virginia Commission on Youth, 1993).

Nieto (2002) relates the following story of arrest and separation:

> One boy, now 16, was nine years old when the police came to his door. They arrested his mother, who used drugs, but left him and his infant brother behind (he speculates now that they must have thought there was another adult in the house). For two weeks, he took care of the baby and stayed inside, waiting for his mother to come back. Eventually, a neighbor stopped by and called the authorities and he and his brother went into separate foster homes. He didn't see his mother again until he was a teenager. (p. 5)

Children experience periods of anger, anxiety, concentration difficulty, depression, shame, and fear after their parents' imprisonment (Nieto, 2002; Simmons, 2003). Children may become so traumatized by the impact of parental incarceration that the psychological, emotional, and social difficulties may converge in ways that cause them to act out inappropriately. Early criminologist researchers (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Robins, West, & Herjanic, 1975) and a growing group of researchers in diverse fields (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002a; Johnston & Gabel, 1995; Murray, Farrington, Sekol, & Olsen, 2009) predicted that these children can fall victim to intergenerational criminality. Left alone without adult care, the literature states that such children are five to six or seven times more likely than their peers to become a part of the prison system as inmates (Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2004; Congressional Record, 2007; Johnston, 1995b). The cycle of incarceration started by their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents continues (Johnston, 1995b; Mumola, 2000).

The third area of inquiry is the level of economic impact that these children experience within family units after parents are imprisoned. Research indicates that the families are generally poor and, in the case of African-American children, often

grandmothers are in charge of them and responsible for their care (Johnston, 1995a; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Wright & Seymour, 2000). In too many cases, life spirals downward and families fall deeper into poverty because their economic circumstances make them poor choices to care for additional people. Communities feel the economic impact too because these children more likely drop out of school, reducing their ability to successfully become contributors to the economy through employment, and instead add to the illegal activity in the streets. Thirteen years ago, Cohen (1998), an economist, suggested that the cost of losing a child from school dropout, underemployment, and possibly engaging in criminal activity that leads to prison far exceeds the $2 million investment he computed that would save one at-risk child.

The shortage of help for these children is evident by the slow movement of frontline systems and politicians to act (Simmons, 2003). There is a leadership void in meeting the children's needs. Research shows that children are losing parental leadership twice: first, when the parent is incarcerated, and second, when states backed by the law take charge of minors. Several states practice terminating parental rights (Simmons, 2003). Children may have to take on new roles following parental imprisonment because the risks are high.

Statement of the Problem

Today more than 2 million children in the United States under 18 years old wake up each morning with one or both parents incarcerated; the majority of them are African-American. The information known about this at-risk subpopulation is limited. When police arrest adult individuals, too often the children are left as silent witnesses on the sidewalks. The children are left to make a life for themselves without proper support.

There is no legal mandate to find out whether children are at home with family or friends. When a parent goes to jail, the children are not considered, and all stages of the process fail them. They are invisible to society. They live in poverty, hostages in neighborhoods devastated by violence, inadequate housing, and enormous issues outside of their control.

However, some of them do emerge as overcomer—mentally healthy and productive citizens (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). But, we do not know why and how some of them overcome the experience of parental incarceration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple-case study was to describe the impact of parental incarceration on African-American young adults (18 years and older) who overcame their difficult situations and went on to graduate from high school. Through the investigation process, this study sought to learn what role family, community, and resiliency played in assisting them to overcome the risks and adversities by giving them an opportunity to recount and tell their past childhood experiences. The results will offer valuable insights that could only enrich the current information in the field.

Research Questions

The current study began with the following central questions: How do African-American young adults (18 years and older) describe the impact of parental incarceration on their lives, and how they were able to overcome the difficult situation and graduate from high school?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative, multiple-case design with emphasis on narrative inquiry. I interviewed 12 African-American young adults (ages 18 and older) who had experienced parental incarceration during childhood, and I met with them in an interview format consisting of 60- to 90-minute sessions. Upon completion, I analyzed and shared the results. The semi-structured interviews provided comprehensive information on the participants' perceptions and diverse experiences. Data were collected, summarized, and interpreted.

All 12 interviewees had completed high school and had never committed a criminal act. I used the interview process to establish a conversational atmosphere, and I encouraged each individual to talk candidly about recollections of a period when one or both parents were incarcerated. In a few cases, the participants brought artifacts such as personal letters and poetry to help trigger memories during the sessions. To aid the process of obtaining a deeper understanding of everyone's world, each participant was asked to recount chronologically as much as possible. As a result, analysis came from their in-depth descriptions.

I conducted my research on the East Coast of the United States, concentrating on Maryland, New Jersey, and New York, as these locations had very large percentages of African-Americans in prison. This study became dynamic because it demonstrated the importance of evolving through discovery (Yin, 2003).

Rationale for the Study

Regardless of one's view about America's war on crime, the current evidence demands societal engagement in finding positive solutions to stem the tide of American

children left without parents because of incarceration. One at-risk minor child causes concern; millions cause an alarm. Making matters worse, no one has accurate overall data on the number of children needing extra care (Bernstein, 2005; Johnson-Peterkin, 2003; Mumola, 2000, 2006; Simmons, 2000). Missed opportunities have increasingly produced concern about the small-scale literature reviews on the children who are the victims, yet very few researchers have bothered to have direct contact with them. This is a common occurrence, and the result is gaps in knowledge about the children's lives after parental imprisonment. The reviews focus on the criminal parents and fall short in capturing the essence of the human problem (Adalist-Estrin, 2003; Benard, 1995; Johnson-Peterkin, 2003; Travis & Waul, 2004). In fact, some studies suggest that the children will most likely be in prison by the time they reach adulthood (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Robertson, 2007).

Braman and Wood state (2003):

> Incarceration reaches more deeply into the substance of family and community life than standard accounts of criminal sanctions suggest. Forcefully transforming the material and social lives of families, incarceration creates a set of concurrent problems, which, in combination, strain relationships and break apart fragile families. The accounts of families attempting to cope with incarceration, typically missing from criminal justice and child development literatures, illustrate a broad array of consequences for families as a whole and for children in particular. (p. 159)

Existing published literature reviews still show gaps in information collection, protocols, and training for law enforcement members and other child-service support personnel (Simmons, 2003; Walker, 2005; Wright & Seymour, 2000). The difficulties are not new to the children, but the scale of the parental problem is by and large not only new but insurmountable. The racial disparities alone are troubling, especially the over-representation of African-American children (Mumola, 2000; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Hagan, Myers, and Mackintosh's (2005) longitudinal studies in Virginia are of great significance on the resiliency of some children. Their results indicate that it is possible to survive the years of parental incarceration using confidence and a positive outlook as cornerstones for overcoming challenges and avoiding adjustment problems. This is vital evidence for this study because critical knowledge from resilient African-American young adults was sought.

Theoretical Framework

Parental incarceration causes a series of crises that present obstacles for children and create challenges in their lives that most researchers describe as complex. A sober analysis of the facts concerning children with incarcerated parents reveals that current scholars are concerned about incarceration and how it impacts their lives (Hagan, 1996; Hairston, 2002; Johnston, 1992).

There is no comprehensive theory that encompasses all aspects of the topic of children affected by parental incarceration, but there are two theories that give us an opportunity to learn more. The foundation of this study is based on aspects of the basic tenets of the classic attachment theory of Bowlby (1969), whose viewpoints draw attention to the problem imposed by incarceration upon the less-studied parent-child bond in social and emotional development. The risk and resilience theory of Garmezy (1971) and Rutter (1979) bring to light concepts that enlarge the scope of adjustment and adaptation and provide grounds for predicting consequences for the children.

The Attachment Theory

The Attachment Theory concerns "relationships between humans" and its legacy is its most important tenet, which states that "a young child needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally" (Cassidy, 1999, p. 12). In Cassidy's (1999) reporting on this framework, he concluded that without a quality investment in a relationship, there cannot be any quality bonding. Cassidy (1999) insists that "secure attachment occurs when a child has a mental representation of the attachment figure as available and responsive when needed" (p. 7).

Historically, the Attachment Theory's legacy lies with John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) as cited in Inge Bretherton's (1983, 1992) research reviews. Both individuals were tenacious in their research of the basic ideas of attachment, but they went much further in seeking answers to understand social development and the reality of a child's close relationships. John Bowlby was prolific in promoting his own ideas about the need for humans to become attached in positive ways. He focused on maternal care and child personality development (Holmes, 1993). Mary Ainsworth is responsible for Bowlby's attachment theory's wider appeal. She advanced his work empirically, tested his ideas, and expanded his theory during the 1960s and 1970s.

Bowlby (1969) fought to prove that attachment is a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (p. 194). However, he found out that his fiercest critics were his own academic community, who resented his stance at that time. Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory was rooted in his work with children in institutions, where he

was not afraid to re-examine evidence and change course in a succinct fashion because he was a clinician first, then a researcher.

Bowlby (1944) gives insight about his enquiry into "the magnitude and social importance of youthful stealing" through observation of 40 adolescents referred to the clinic where he worked (p. 20). John Bowlby spoke of one boy:

> In this enquiry, very great attention was given to the elucidation of the mother-child relationship. . . . Kenneth was referred for cruelty to the younger children, bad temper and disobedience. It was found that he had stolen for a number of years. . . . He showed keen resentment towards his mother. . . . The boy's complete lack of normal affection together with his indifference and plausibility were all typical of the Affectionless Character. He was noteworthy, however, for being actively cruel. (pp. 20, 29)

The Attachment Theory is worthy of attention in this study. Bowlby dared to go against the traditional thought of his mentors in his day. His theoretical position has survived controversy and debate due to his never doubting the theoretical implications and his acceptance of contributions by Mary Ainsworth (1967) and Mary Main (1991).

The Risk and Resilience Theory

The Risk and Resilience Theory is based on years of study by social scientists who turned their attention to identifying strengths, talents, and relational attachments of individuals and families who seem to have the capacity to take charge of their lives and go on to overcome persistent hardships and risks successfully (Masten, 2009; Rutter, 1987; Walsh, 1998). This theory seeks to foster key protective processes that enable individuals to effectively cope and emerge tougher (Masten, 2009).

In the resiliency literature, the common theme seems to be centered on "Risk, Resilience, and Recovery" (Benard, 2004, p. 1). Since 1955, Emmy E. Werner has reported on findings pertinent to the theory's properties. Throughout the years, she has

kept the focus on these high-risk children who manage to be buoyant after being challenged by persistent high risk and adversities (Werner & Smith, 1992). The impact of studies such as Werner's is seen in the shift toward moving away from the negative outcomes and onto this "self-righting tendency of humans" (Jones, 2007, p. 495). Norman Garmezy (1974) of the University of Minnesota and Michael Rutter (1979) of the Institute of Psychiatry in London are two of the social researchers instrumental in the change. Although they worked independently, both are credited for the foundational work that helped an entire generation of resilience researchers (Blum, 1998). Masten, Best, and Garmezy's (1990) and Benard's (1991) work also has had significant impact in furthering the theory. Masten (2009) contends that the processes are important in the context of risks threatening the development of children, adolescents, and young adults. Benard (1991) suggests that individuals compensate for risks coming from a variety of environmental influences and respond in unique ways, utilizing protective supports.

Masten (2001) affirms:

> What began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary. Resiliency does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the every-day magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities. (p. 235)

A task for the study was to discover *how* or *if* the mentioned theories can help to shed light and provide a deeper understanding of these children's diverse experiences.

Importance of the Study

This study is pivotal because, a decade ago, Hairston (1999) decried that the empirical research work was deficient in methods used to gather information about the children of prisoners, and her sentiment is still voiced today. It is critical to review recent

studies about this population because much is not addressed, which leaves knowledge gaps. According to Seymour (2001), researchers rely on inmate parents and professionals to inform about incarceration's impact; therefore, several studies are filled with misinformation about the children, especially about what they feel or need. Significant is the limited studies, the separation impact, and the lack of gathered information by law officials and child-care authorities who, in most cases, ignore their existence (Lengyel & Harris, 2003; Seymour, 1996; Waul, Travis & Solomon, 2002).

The paths taken by small studies are too broad, and they document the negative consequences most often (Johnson, 2007). This study provided a venue to investigate the most affected: African-American young adult children who are impacted significantly by the event of parental incarceration (Council on Crime and Justice, 2006). Moreover, the study's process afforded mature young people the advantage of face-to-face interviews so that they could give perceptions and perspectives of their actual experiences with the prison world due to the incarceration of parents.

Admittedly, how some children of parental incarceration survive with minimum damage is not fully understood because no one knows how much damage is done to individual children; only they can give an accurate picture through descriptive stories (Hairston, 2001; LaVigne, Davies, & Brazzell, 2008). Hence, this study's results will contribute to the existing research on children of parental incarceration and its impact on the lives of African-American young adults, specifically those who proved to be resilient. In addition, the study will unfold emerging themes on the critical knowledge gathered from the direct contact with the young people who offer insight and learning about their very personal diverse experiences from having incarcerated parents.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this research, *participants* are defined as young adults who, in their youth (less than 18 years of age), had one or both parents incarcerated for a length of time. The term *parent* incorporates mother, father, or anyone else who is a legal guardian for the child. The following are other terms used in this study:

Antisocial behavior: A cluster of related behaviors, including disobedience, aggression, temper tantrums, lying, stealing, and violence (Eddy & Reid, 2002).

Attachment Theory: A theory about the psychological concept of attachment: the tendency of a child to seek and form a lasting, secure, and positive bond of mutual relationship to a mother (caregiver). Insecure attachment happens through disruption of the bond due to separation and deprivation. Early research was conducted by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1979, 1980; Bretherton, 1992).

Caregiver: An individual responsible for the care of a child with at least one incarcerated parent. The caregiver may be a parent, grandmother or other relative, foster parent, or neighbor (Bernstein, 2005).

Competence: A variety of adaptive behaviors of children, enabling them to achieve resilient outcomes (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Family strengths: Traits that facilitate the ability of the family to meet the needs of its members and the demands made upon it by the system outside the family unit (Hill, 1999, p. 42).

Frontline systems: Agencies such as public schools, child welfare, juvenile justice, child protection, child care, foster care, and mental health, which serve the public/children (San Francisco Partnership, 2003).

Imprisonment of a parent: Confinement in state and federal jails or prisons in the United States. This study covers the possible impact of parental imprisonment on children and focuses on their diverse experiences during childhood (Murray et al., 2009, p. 11).

Risk factors: Any events, conditions, or experiences that increase the probability that a problem will be formed, maintained, or exacerbated (Jenson & Fraser, 2005, p. 6).

Resilience: In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, (a) the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and (b) a condition of the individual's family, community, and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways. Here, navigation refers both to a child's capacity to seek help, as well as the availability of the help sought (Ungar, 2008, p. 225).

Risk and Resilience Theory: A belief that some individuals have the ability to cultivate strengths and positively cope with persistent stress and catastrophe and return to reparation of one's self after hardship (Silliman, 1994; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993).

Social stigma: Being denied the social support and sympathy provided to children experiencing other types of parental separation or loss, such as divorce or death (Arditti, 2005).

Vulnerability factors: Characteristics of the child that tend to intensify the effects of risk factors' negative outcomes. They occur when the risk variable is present (Rutter, 1990).

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to African-American young adults, 18 years old and older, who had at least one parent incarcerated during their childhood. These young adults have also graduated from high school and have not been incarcerated at any time during their lives.

Limitations of the Study

There is limited research on this population. Researchers do not have an accurate number of how many children are affected by parental incarceration. These young adults were the exemplars. The participants in this study have never brought out into the open this traumatic experience and have preferred to keep it private. Locating these individuals to participate in this study was daunting; the lack of comprehensive data made it extremely difficult.

Assumptions

In this study, it was assumed that parental incarceration impacts children and is a complex problem, particularly in the African-American communities.

It was also assumed that the participants during the interviews gave open and honest descriptions of their lives. However, they could have chosen to protect themselves and/or their incarcerated parent by limiting disclosure or they might have felt whatever they said might jeopardize the parent-child relationship.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduced an overall rationale for this study: the impact of family, community, and resilience on African-

American young adults who had parents incarcerated during their childhood. It built a case for the problem of parental incarceration as it related to the children and included the introduction to the topic, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the conceptual framework, the delimitations and limitations.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical models that guided the research. This chapter provides a review of information, including existing empirical data, generated by a diverse group of researchers. The information is broad in scope and addresses the intensity of the children's lives after parental incarceration. The chapter pays particular attention to the influences on children, especially on the African-American offspring.

Chapter 3 gives a detailed account of the methodology and design used in this study. The chapter is outlined to make the study reliable and valid and its findings acceptable.

Chapter 4 presents the African-American young people's stories. Evidence is given of their diverse reactions to the daunting news of paternal incarceration. This chapter follows their paths to key supportive attachments. The relationships are explored in the context of their significance to the children's ability to cope effectively, cultivate strengths, meet the challenges of their situations, and go on to live full lives.

Chapter 5 covers individual cases through cross-case analysis. This chapter seeks to answer the questions, "How do African-American young adults (18 years and older) describe the impact of parental incarceration on their lives, and how were they able to overcome the difficult situation and graduate from high school?"

Chapter 6 recapitulates the research problem and design. Incarceration causes disruption in children's lives, putting them at risk for continuing the cycle of

intergenerational criminality. Through the rich descriptive details of those childhood experiences, this chapter provides key findings, results (interpretations), the restatement of the research question, the discussion on the emerged perspectives, practical current and future research recommendations, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

To facilitate presentation of findings of this literature review regarding the psychological, social, and academic consequences of the impact of parental incarceration on African-American offspring, the following three parts were created: (a) the scope of the problem of parental incarceration's effects on offspring; (b) the theoretical framework to help understand the impact of parental incarceration on African-American offspring; and (c) the impact of parental incarceration on offspring, particularly African-American.

The Scope of the Problem

To improve the overall understanding of how this phenomenon affects children, the review considers literature that explains the scope of the problem.

For decades, "mass incarceration has had significant and long-lasting impacts on American society and particularly on communities of color" (Dallaire, 2007, p. 440). Incarceration separates families. Children in such families are unprepared for the difficulties that lie ahead and the loss of relationships that often happens. Like their parents, children have not been spared the negative consequences, and are more likely to exhibit behaviors that may negatively affect their futures (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Murray & Farrington, 2005).

Estimates of the number of children impacted by parental incarceration vary too often to dispute a researcher's figures because "the prison system is like a revolving door with thousands of people admitted every day and thousands more being released" (Griess, 2007, p. 2). However, most researchers (e.g., Martone, 2005; Mumola, 2004) agree that 70% of studies' numbers refer to non-White children. The same children are found in every place where people have settled and are a part of a community (Dallaire, 2007; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mauer et al., 2009).

As early as 2003, Thomas Bonczar concluded from his statistical data results that Black men between the ages of 35 and 44 were incarcerated disproportionately, and served more time in prison than Hispanic or Caucasian males. In sharing the 2001 statistical report, Bonczar (2003) indicated that about "one in three Black males are expected to go to prison during their lifetime if current incarceration rates remain" (p. 1). Raphael's (2004) investigative results showed that at the dawn of the 21st century, Black men (1 in 5), without a high-school diploma, were in prison. He also found that "none of the major households' surveys in the United States ask respondents whether they have served time" (p. 10).

By 2009, the Pew Charitable Trust considered this stark difference; the common practice by America's Correction System to concentrate on certain communities. The empirical data confirmed that this practice targeted people by "race and geography. . . . Black adults are four times as likely as Whites and nearly 2.5 times as likely as Hispanics to be under correctional control. One in 11 black adults—9.2%—was under correctional supervision at year end 2007" (p. 5).

Much research has focused on the poorest-educated Black males in prison, but through other studies a pattern of incarceration among Black women has surfaced. Black women do not fare any better, according to statisticians Glaze and Maruschak (2008). Their colleagues Sabol and Couture (2008) remind us that by 2007, "the incarceration rate of Black women in custody (prison or jail) was 348 per 100,000 U.S. residents compared to 146 Hispanic women and 95 White women" (p. 8). In fact, it means that more Black mothers are being imprisoned today. In New York State alone, inmate mothers and fathers report having 80,800 children (Hub Report, 2007). Special statistical reports from the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau have produced some evidence that confirm that mothers' imprisonments have the greater effect on children and more likely inflict much more damage to children than do fathers' imprisonments (Dallaire, 2007).

Worrisome incarceration practice devastates African-Americans families. The growing awareness that more children are threatened by its impact, suffer, and face difficult challenges that can derail them for life has heightened interest in this social problem (Baunach, 1985; Hairston, 2003; Kampfner, 1995; Murray & Farrington, 2005).

In anticipation of considering the impact of incarceration on offspring, it is important to look at theories that can provide a theoretical framework as one considers the impact of parental incarceration on offspring and how some offspring survive the impact of parental incarceration to the extent that they graduate from high school.

Theoretical Framework

The need to understand the human cost led to the study of theory and did indicate that some kind of theoretical framework was needed to look at the impact of parental incarceration on children. The theories of (a) Attachment and (b) Risk and Resilience

were selected. The Attachment Theory explained what children needed in order to develop in socially and emotionally normal ways and it explored the ramifications of them not feeling safe and secure in human relationships. The Risk and Resilience Theory explained how children who are at high risk and experience adverse environmental conditions may be resilient. Ultimately, these theories give insight regarding children of prisoners who are suffering, with the goal of helping them.

The Attachment Theory

The first theory that relates to how offspring of incarcerated parents survive is the Attachment Theory.

This theory argues that losing the emotional attachment to a parent affects the child's normal development (Bowlby, 1969). It looks at positive and negative changes in a child's life that would affect the physical development (Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999). A child must feel secure in his relationship with the parent—no excessive separation anxiety, no threats of abandonment in order to develop healthy relationships (Bowlby, 1973). The idea was championed by John Bowlby, whose work stimulated other developmental scientists and other interested parties to focus on the well-being of children. This theory is one of the most important methods of understanding the growth stages of children (Beystehner, 1998; Holmes, 1993). The theory also addresses the environmental influence affecting interpersonal relationships of the children later in life, especially their personalities if, during childhood, they experienced interruption of maternal bonding through separation (Bowlby, 1973).

Bowlby represented new thinking of nontraditional ideas about attachment relations between parents and children. One likes to think that his educational

background in science and medicine was the reason for such piqued interest in human development in natural settings (Bretherton, 1990; Stern, 1985). By placing attachment theory in a prominent place in study, Bowlby moved it out of the shadows and into the public arena.

By the end of 1945, Bowlby's experiences so far with maladjusted boys through his observations led him to accept a leadership position at London Tavistock Clinic in the children's department. His tenure there advanced his attachment notions. He studied "family interaction patterns" that called for treating family relationships between parents and children as a critical part of a troubled child's therapy (Bretherton, 1992, pp. 761, 762). Bowlby later left the school and went on to conduct his first empirical study of 44 cases of juvenile thieves in 1946. He linked their emotional problems and their inappropriate behavior to "histories of maternal deprivation and separation" (Bretherton, 1992, p. 761).

At the end of 1969, the attachment theory was reformulated by Bowlby due to his flexibility in learning how to improve the concepts that drove the blueprint of attachment. One reason for this action was his devotion to extensive research, describing it as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194).

In 1973, John Bowlby spoke the following words to sum up his perspective:

> No variables have more far-reaching effects on personality development than a child's experiences within the family. Starting during his first months in his relation to both parents, he builds up working models of how attachment figures are likely to behave towards him in any of a variety of situations, and on all those models are based all his expectations, and therefore all his plans, for the rest of his life. (p. 369)

Years later, Hardy (2007) recalled the above words, once spoken by Bowlby, and affirmed his own acceptance of such thought. Indeed, the predictor for future outcomes

was children's early experiences with interpersonal relationships in their world. The attachment or the non-attachment relationship patterns were important to children's personality development and should be observed in the context of their relationship with their maternal caregiver. Actually, Fonagy (2001) argues that "the set goal of the attachment system is 'felt security' rather than physical distance regulation" (p. 13).

Why Is the Attachment Theory Important?

The Attachment Theory is important because it has been recognized by psychologists and other scientists from diverse fields to be one of the most important theoretical developments in understanding mental functioning and developmental growth stages of children (Beystehner, 1998; Holmes, 1993).

The Attachment Theory has proven to be of significant importance in understanding the impact of separation from parents on a child's development through the work of both Ainsworth (1985, 1991) and Bowlby (1988, 1991). Both researchers recognized that the cumulative nature of a child's development must entail both early and later experiences in the shaping of a child's cognitive and psychological growth. Through Bowlby's insistence that "excessive separation anxiety is due to adverse family experience—such as repeated threats of abandonment, for which the child feels responsible," attachment conversation and work continued in laboratories and the field (Bretherton, 1992, p. 769; Lee, 2003; Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

Mary Ainsworth, an American psychologist, was the first person to bring Bowlby's landmark theory to the United States (Sonkin, 2005). The collaborative book (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) detailing valuable empirical information helped to advance the study of attachment patterns of infants that built on Bowlby's first

contribution, which were social relationships. She discovered unexpected patterns and saw the link to Bowlby's (1959) theory on prolonged separation. She linked security to caregiving (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bretherton, 1992).

Mary Main's (1991) significance is that she brought further advances to this field of knowledge. She concentrated on the patterns "from the external world of interpersonal interaction to the internal world of mental representations" (Bretherton, 1992; Bretherton & Waters, 1985; Wallin, 2007, pp. 25, 26). Basically, she pointed to her study of adults' recollections of their bonding experiences with parents as valuable information about the negatives and positives of emotional attachment.

Martin's (2001) and Poehlmann's (2005) studies point to the mother figures separated from their children due to incarceration. They argue that separation introduces risks that lead to problematic behavior and possibly damage children emotionally. They predict that such children will have difficulty maintaining healthy relationships with the incarcerated parents and any other person on the outside. Raikes and Thompson (2005) agree with their viewpoint and claim that poor living conditions may be another cause for children's inability to develop secure attachment relationships.

Other researchers have found that securely attached children tend to be inclined to lean toward a more cooperative spirit with their mothers, perform better in school, and seek out positive relationships with teachers and peers as compared to insecurely attached children. Viewed together, such research affirms the impact of Bowlby's theory of early attachment and later determines a child's developmental outcome (Bretherton, 1992). Clearly alarmed, Bowlby leaves a lasting legacy in one statement: "If a community values its children, it must cherish their parents (Bowlby, 1951, p. 84).

Harris (1998), and Pinker (2002) are strong critics of Bowlby, in spite of his dominance in the field of developmental psychology in the last century. They attacked his notion about the influence of children's environment being critical to interpersonal relationships later in life. They attacked his emphasis on children's personality being affected if, for any reason, the strong bond between mother and infant was interrupted through separation.

Harris (1998) argued for behavioral genetics and peer influences. She believed that these two influences shape the social development of children. She opposed Bowlby's (1988) view because he only gave parents credit for shaping their children's personality. She saw this idea too narrow in scope.

Pinker (2002) argued his view in his book *The Blank Slate: the Modern Denial of Human Nature*. Although he drew from decades of good research in the sciences dealing with human nature, he stuck to his own views and attacked Bowlby's (1988) theory that gave credence to the role that primary caregiver mothers play in the lives of their children. Pinker felt that Bowlby was incorrect in placing so much emphasis on mothers' roles in later behavioral patterns of their children. He held on to his own premise that an infant's mind is a blank slate, and within the womb, genetics predisposes how he or she will turn out.

In 1977, Sroufe and Waters asserted that indeed assessments conducted on attachment influences favor the powerful predictor theme of Bowlby. Nonetheless, they insist that the influence of attachment is broader. The child-mother attachment relationship is consistent with "normative patterns of attachment behavior." It is

compatible with "social learning or cognitive approaches" (p. 1196). Sroufe and Waters urge assessment of "interactive behavior and the process of bonding" (p. 1196).

Sroufe et al.'s (1999) research covers Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory from conception to implications of positive or negative changes in the child's life that would affect development.

The Attachment Theory Informs This Research

This theory informs with clarity the "cognitive constructs" that will give insight to extraordinary experiences of children such as a particular traumatic event that affects them early and later in life (Waters, Crowell, Elliott, Corcoran, & Treboux, 2002, p. 230).

The value of the Attachment Theory is in the repeated empirical testing that elevated its prominence through the years. The different ideas permeating from the laboratories and written articles of Bowlby (1988) set off strong feelings for and against him. The naysayers helped to sustain interest in his theory due in part to their fierce private and public debates about it. Their bitterness raised not only their fellow colleagues' interest but the interest of others in diverse fields that has been sustained over time. Interestingly, the quality of attachment is one of the strongest predictors of later development of children, and its two basis patterns, attachment or non-attachment, are the forecasters of outcomes (Bretherton, 1992).

Shaver and Mikulincer (2005) used the public scrutiny to give concrete evidence that Bowlby's (1988) contributions were remarkable and warranted their effort. They were motivated to repeatedly test Bowlby's attachment theory and show that it could be measured. Their commitment to use their quantitative skills, along with appropriate

techniques, showed that, in the end, anyone could empirically analyze Bowlby's attachment representations about "emotional bonding and emotional regulation" (p. 25).

Harsh or inconsistent care in early years of childhood without human affections was an indicator that most likely children would exhibit negative behaviors, short- and long-term. The theory's premise held true that children needed to feel maternal or caregiver's affections, and if not felt, the children succumbed to negative forces because they felt insecure and deprived of relationship bonding (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Currently, there is enough evidence to conduct "quantitative and qualitative" investigations (Appleyard & Berlin, 2007, p. 2). The evidence exists that shows children may have emotional, mental, and physical developmental issues leading to poor social skills if no one comes to their rescue (Bretherton, 1992; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002).

In summary, Bowlby's attachment theory had longevity, and during the time when he put forth a lot of effort to prove the merit of his ideas, some opposed them and others worked diligently to present evidence to the contrary. The theory has withstood numerous investigations for empirical value. The various pathways of children were traced, and the theory discussed what affected normal function. Therefore, this study has incorporated Attachment Theory into its theoretical framework. The second philosophical underpinning of this study is the Risk and Resilience Theory.

The Risk and Resilience Theory

The Risk and Resilience Theory concerns the expectation that individuals have the "psychological ability to successfully cope with severe stress and negative events." It is studied widely by scientists, and its concept has "important implications for the

development of delinquency prevention" (Hawkins, Graham, Williams, & Zahn, 2009, p. 1).

Although the concept is popular today, for decades ambiguity was found in resilience definitions, and this made the theory a broadly defined concept (Kaplan, 1999). The conceptualization differences have been problematic, and they led to confusion. Scientists have not been able to agree on a clear meaning (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Olsson, Bond, & Burns, 2003).

Some common views of the theory have added to the difficulty of scientists to explain fully why some children are resilient while others are not. One past view was Norma Garmezy's (1991) belief that resilient individuals had the "tendency to rebound, or recoil" (p. 463). Walsh's (1996) view explained the difficulty: "resilience is commonly thought of as inborn, as if resilient persons grow themselves up: either they had the 'right stuff' all along—a biological hardiness—or they acquired it by their own initiative and good fortune" (pp. 262-263). The last view of Kaplan (2005) conceptualizes resilience as "a person's ability to positively adapt or achieve success despite being abused or neglected, witnessing violence, or living in poverty—that could lead to negative outcomes such as delinquency" (Kaplan, 2005, pp. 39, 40).

Regardless of the origin or confusion of resilience, the literature confirms that the theory's continued development can promote a greater sense of well-being in individuals. The resilience premise regards situations and time being important in the process of becoming resilient and not in the quality of the person who is going through the negative events (Luthar, 2006).

The Risk and Resilience Theory basically involves two phenomena. First, a person experiences a threat or unfavorable harsh environmental conditions, and second, the person is able to withstand the trauma (Luthar et al., 2000). But, this theory (Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996) is primarily defined by the resilience premise of the "presence of protective factors (personal, social, familial, and institutional safety nets) which enable individuals to resist life stress" (p. 158).

However, the early investigations produced much literature promoting the negative influences as contributing to the abnormal development of children. This was the at-risk approach, and although it was important from a theoretical perspective, it only exposed the negative experiences and the children's inappropriate behaviors (Benard, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1982). The risk information lacked the promotion of well-being and healing (Rutter, 1997). A buffer was needed to lessen the effects of risk in children's lives (Wright & Masten, 2005). Gradually a paradigm shift took place, and scientists turned their attention to healthy, positive outcomes "rather than dysfunction" (Marshall, 1998, p. 57; Masten, 2009).

The benefit for theorists today is that the pioneering studies of children laid the foundation for the understanding of resiliency in adults and families (Van Breda, 2001). Pioneers Rutter (1987) and Garmezy (1985) contributed much to the discussion. Their research examined protective supports. They suggested that the individual perspectives were important, along with supportive parents and positive external family relationships.

Therefore, resilience theory as a construct has been part of Western society's conversation for decades. Ann Masten (2001) and Michael Rutter (2008, 1987) are examples of several theorists whose findings tend to capture the common thought today

that people who are considered resilient possess the capacity to adapt successfully even though they experience acute stress, trauma, and adversities. Today, the protective process is seen as the positive force behind the theory of resiliency.

Luthar et al. (2000) suggest that this dynamic process of endurance helps individuals to grow stronger and exhibit an ability to be resourceful. Those children who use their risks and adversities as motivators to survive and do better than expected are found to have the capacity to adapt with the help from positive support in the form of family systems and/or community. According to other researchers, the responsible supporters give the children what they mentally and emotionally need to regain self-worth (Garmezy, 1985; Glantz & Johnson, 1999; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2008; Ungar, 2008).

The pioneering of resilience theory centered on schizophrenia illness by Norman Garmezy in 1973. He was interested in knowing why some individuals become mentally ill and others remain mentally healthy. He was eager to learn about the protective influences by understanding the risks (Masten & Powell, 2003; Masten et al., 1990). The observation of the children captivated Garmezy, and through observing them diligently, he discovered that 90% of them did not develop the mental illness (schizophrenia) of their parents. He was so stimulated by the findings that he forged ahead and observed many more children over time, and to his delight, they developed well. Both he and his research program "Project Competence" gave rise, in part, to resiliency research (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Garmezy, 1973; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten & Powell, 1999, p. 1; McCarthy, 2001). One year later, Norman Garmezy collaborated with

Streitman (1974) to find answers that would explain how support systems play a role in good development that leads to resiliency.

By 1982, scientist Emmy Werner (Werner & Smith, 1982) was recognized as another pioneer. She is credited with showing that resilient children and their loved ones have characteristics that set them apart from children who don't have those characteristics. She traveled to Kauai, Hawaii, for the purpose of conducting an empirical study on children living in acute poverty. Her longitudinal study took into consideration that many children had alcoholic or mentally sick parents, causing tensions and high stress to them as they grew up. Other negative conditions were also present. When the study was over, most of the adolescents were leading a destructive life (accepting the victim role) while a smaller number of them withstood the disruptive life challenges and thrived. She was impressed and realized that she had discovered another important outcome that could only help further the resilience ideas.

Therefore, the first group of pioneers conducted and reviewed several empirical studies. They played a key role in identifying environmental risks and individual characteristics that revealed personal vulnerabilities that made children weak and susceptible to succumb to antisocial behavior, resulting in negative outcomes by adulthood (Smokowski, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1982). Later studies focused on unearthing the positive processes beyond the children that promote the possibility of positive outcomes in the future of those children who withstand the risks (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Ungar, 2008). According to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), there is a deliberate action taken to direct an individual to a positive pathway "to foster competence and to prevent problems" (p. 216).

Why Is the Risk and Resilience Theory Important?

The Risk and Resilience Theory is important because "a great contribution of resilience theory has been to help us understand how an individual's perspective on life difficulties fundamentally affects the individual's experience of/and response to the difficulty" (Van Breda, 2001, p. 6). It used empirical research to discover answers to the human problem of why and how some children under the same high stressful environmental conditions (e.g., acute poverty and family dysfunction) are able to function normally while others under the same environmental conditions respond in destructive ways, displaying vulnerabilities and weaknesses (Luthar, 1999; Werner, 1982).

A new radical way moved from the old phenomenon of being fixated on the problems and embraced the path of protecting the individual child from private and/or external environmental threats (Masten & Powell, 2003). The buffering, according to Rutter (1987), does not eliminate the threats, but the support allows the individual to cope effectively with them.

There are things that can be changed so children can be resilient. One of those is home care. The central belief is that children need home environments to be structured in a way that fosters nurturing (being warm and emotionally supportive). The home environments should foster high expectations in the areas of behavior and work (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). The family, through showing affection, sustains the happiness of the child. The literature evidence backs the premise that if at least one parent supports the child and/or adult members of the extended family reach out to the child, the connection helps the child to be resilient against the impact of trauma and difficulties (Benard, 1991; Ungar, 2008; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Werner and Smith (1992) cited the scientific evidence from their study of adolescents to affirm this premise. Many youths were in multiple- and severe-risk home situations, yet they could report that in some cases "self-esteem and self-efficacy were promoted through supportive relationships. The resilient youngsters in our study all had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally, "regardless of temperament, idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence" (p. 205). Those youngsters thrived and developed by 18 years old into "confident, capable, and caring adults" while those who were not accepted and did not enjoy supportive relationships developed abnormally (p. 1). Therefore, the home and/or external adult connection enables some children to positively adapt and rebound.

Research conducted by Niara Sudarkasa (1997) found that African-American families in particular find it most salient "rediscovering and instilling the values that made it possible for these families to persist and prevail in the past" (p. 30). According to Sudarkasa, historically, African-American families held firm to values that enabled them to survive thousands of miles away from their homeland, Africa. She is not by any means suggesting that all African-American families had such features present that supported family structures. But she felt that respect, restraint, reverence, and reconciliation were some values that had sustenance power for families. According to McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, and Futrell (1998), those features within this particular family culture are important; they set African Americans apart because tied to their identity was an inherent strength that helped them to become resilient.

Another factor that can be changed in order to allow children to be resilient is community involvement. A child who lives in a disadvantaged neighborhood and is

living under adverse home conditions needs external support beyond the family (Luthar, 2006). A resilient community is one that seeks out children who may be at risk of becoming delinquents due to high stress, trauma, and harsh home conditions. Literature suggests that communities to which children are attached and that have social organizations within the environment, including churches and other supportive resources available to them, are conducive to assisting in the rebounding process (Luthar, 2006).

At-risk children adhere to acceptable social behavior when they feel attached to caring adults in the community. This theory is supportive of members in a community who influence the children early in their physical development because they are more inclined to accept the support than later when there is peer pressure (Wright, Masten, Northwood, & Hubbard, 1997). Reflecting these findings, the resilience theory acknowledges the positive outcomes when children are valued, supported, and encouraged to participate in the activities of a community (Benard, 1991). According to Garmezy (1991), if the community and school take a supportive role in the lives of at-risk children and their families, their unique needs will be met.

In the case of the school, children can be resilient if the setting fosters protective supporters. School environments have the potential to provide at-risk children with needed protective support so they can flourish socially and academically in safe places (Perkins & Jones, 2004). The connectedness seems to produce opportunities for interpersonal relationships because the students have a positive outlook about school. They seem not to lean toward juvenile delinquency (Werner & Smith, 1992). One reason is because caring adults are involved in their daily lives and keep close watch of their relationships in the community (Luthar, 2006).

Reflecting upon decades of findings, the theorists pointed to Garmezy (1974), who saw the need for schools to provide support to those students who had the ability to become resilient. According to Benard (1991), resilient children perceive life differently and they have high expectations for themselves, embrace life, set goals, and respond positively to interpersonal relations. With their sharpened skills, they expect the school to be a partner in their efforts to achieve academic success. If the children manage to have this connection, they will be engaged and they will feel a part of the school family.

Interestedly, Christian Smith (2005) acknowledged that a longitudinal study indicated that in the United States, many adolescents had faith and believed themselves to be religious. This contemporary national study drew attention to the suspected ramifications about those who seem to hold on to faith (Bridges & Moore, 2002). Despite the different opinions from researchers on the role religion plays as a deterrent against some delinquent behaviors, adolescents who believe stand a better chance of future positive outcomes (Baier & Wright, 2001). The issue of resilience for some may be tied to religious beliefs.

Research continues to indicate that environmental social support determines children's response to adversity. According to the Resiliency Institute (2003), children live "multifaceted lives" within communities that have several institutions, including religious ones (p. 2). Having children move toward religious faith helps with "competence and resilience" and away from inappropriate behavior (p. 2). The integration of quality relationships and positive experiences helps them to attain "hope, motivation, mastery, values, and a sense of purpose" (Resiliency Institute, 2003, p. 6).

Greene and Cohen's (2006) findings indicate that the resilience theory involves "a spiritual phenomenon" (p. 5). Spirituality seems to act as a buffer to help emotionally stabilize the children. This phenomenon can be seen played out in the African-American community. The cultural history of embracing religion as a source of strength and hope is seen to be significant (Harry, 1992). Psychologically, children in private and external environmental high-risk situations need religious support for healthy development (Chatters & Taylor, 1998). This can be the determining factor as to whether they defy the odds or not of becoming resilient. Research evidence is conclusive that the most effective means of preventing dysfunctional behavior is to ensure community involvement (Resiliency Institute, 2003). Therefore, children impacted by parental incarceration are healthier when they have added spiritual support in working toward becoming resilient. The spiritual life fosters stability (Chatters & Taylor, 2005; Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007).

Luthar et al. (2000), Rutter and Sroufe (2000), and Werner and Smith (1992) see the resilience theory as being important because it exposed the emergence of characteristics in some children such as high self-esteem, "competent," more adaptive, and "caring" (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 1). These children are able to face severe change in their environments yet they are able to respond positively and achieve success. However, close examination of other children by Wildeman (2008) and Simmons (2000, 2003) revealed the opposite effect on young lives due to the absence of positive support. Sometimes the children's emotional reaction to the trauma of separation causes them to exhibit negative patterns of behaviors. The effects not only impact their normal growth

but prevent them from enjoying positive family relationships and school experiences. To the children, incarceration becomes the insurmountable block to their happiness.

The discussion of this theory leads one to consider a criticism that is worth noting. According to the Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2002), the resiliency approach focuses on individuals' strengths and resources, while a risk-based approach focuses on deficits. Focusing on deficits creates an environment in which certain young people can be seen as "less than" and therefore be treated differently than their peers and are weighted down by negative stereotyping and stigmatization. The risk portion of the theory seems to bring forth an avalanche of low expectations, while resiliency research exposes the stark differences in expectations that are high.

In 2001, Marc Braverman observed from his research that some people interpreted resilience to be "a commodity that can be imparted to children to make them immune to problems in their environments" (p. 5). Thus, some writers such as Luthar et al. (2000) have felt the need to criticize the current focus on resilience because they believe that it has the potential to detract from efforts to reduce and control social and environmental risk factors. Actually, they fear any perspective that promotes the need for children to change rather than the society's support systems to do so (Braverman, 2001).

Although resilience studies have been helpful in the exploration of at-risk groups because of the focus on the strengths of individual children, the construct has had serious criticism leveled against it for being too simplistic in understanding the psychological adaptations. The studies are narrow in scope, and they lead researchers to give little recognition to the importance of multiple contexts in children's development (Luthar et

al., 2000). Garbarino (1999) argued that the resiliency construct had disregarded hardships that had an extraordinary effect on some of the non-resilient youth.

Boyden and Cooper (2006) restated this fundamental limitation in simpler terms by claiming that the observation focus is wrong to be only on the individual and how he or she functions in two areas of human experience: intra-psychic function and behavior. They insist that such tunnel vision leaves out a broader perspective or a broader life that involves other vital factors within life's experiences in which there is chronic poverty.

For the past several decades, resilience research has been consistent in pointing to not just risk and paucity but the expanded view of including the strengths that individuals, families, schools, and communities have for self-righting (Werner & Smith, 1992). Moreover, Benard (1991) insists that the key for more than a decade of resilience research work is the "role families, schools, and communities play in supporting, and not undermining, this biological drive for normal human development." She homed in on the findings of others and argued that in most cases resiliency can triumph, even if the cases are extreme situations, such as those caused by "poverty, troubled families, and violent neighborhoods" (Benard, 1991, p. 1).

Today, Bonnie Benard (2004) reports that this theory takes center stage in many schools and community programs in which young people are seen as capable and have the capacity to lead healthy, productive, and responsible lives. She understands the theory at its most fundamental level and reminds us that resiliency research validates prior research work in human development. She disputes the genetic traits theory of other researchers. She insists that every child has specific psychological inner strengths and their environmental social supports determine how they will respond to adversity.

Resiliency springs from within and propels many who were predicted to succumb to daunting lifestyles, who desire to defy the low expectations, and who survive successfully. She describes a resilient individual:

> Social competence (responsiveness, cultural flexibility, empathy, caring, communication skills, and a sense of humor); problem-solving (planning, help-seeking, and critical and creative thinking); autonomy (sense of identity, self-efficacy, self-awareness, task-mastery, and adaptive distancing from negative messages and conditions); and a sense of purpose and belief in a bright future (goal direction, educational aspirations, optimism, faith, and spiritual connectedness). (p. 107)

In 1992, Werner and Smith were fully arguing resilience theory's value after reviewing bodies of international, cross-cultural, and longitudinal studies of youths. They saw resilience research expanding the social and behavioral sciences' focus as more researchers like themselves turned to observing why some children make it and others do not. Their own 40-year empirical study of disadvantaged individuals from the prenatal stage to adulthood exposed risky personal and external environmental conditions. Yet some children actually became healthy beyond the life threats due to protective support from responsible adults. Those children who did not develop normally had no one nurturing their internal resilience.

Ann Masten in 1996 noted in her speech to Congressional and federal agency staff:

> The key to intervention could lie in triggering or facilitating natural protective systems. A crucial question for the future is whether such efforts are the best modeled on naturally occurring resilience or not. The great danger I see in the idea of resilience is expecting children to overcome deprivation and danger on their own. Therefore, I want to close with the same message I opened with. There is no magic here; resilient children have been protected by actions of adults, by good nurturing, by their assets and by opportunities to succeed. We cannot stand by as the infrastructure for child development collapses in this nation, expecting miracles. (p. 24)

The Risk and Resilience Theory Informs This Research

The Risk and Resilience Theory enabled this study to test assumptions through the qualitative research design and to acquire an understanding of "why some children grow up to be emotionally and mentally healthy and well-functioning adults despite having to overcome various forms of adversity" (Braverman, 2001, p. 1). Resilience is set apart for "unpredicted or markedly successful adaptations to negative life events, trauma, stress, and other forms of risk. If we can understand what helps some people to function well in the context of high adversity, we may be able to incorporate this knowledge into practice strategies" (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999, p. 136). Therefore, it was most appropriate to focus on this theory as part of this research to evaluate the impact of parental incarceration on children.

Resilience theory is a work in progress. The first waves of research were compelling and opened up discussions, provoked controversies, and turned a simple theory into a major occupation among researchers across several disciplines (Boyden & Cooper, 2006; Masten & Powell, 1999). From its historical roots, resilience theory has evolved today into one that teaches the limitation inherent in examining pieces of young people's lives instead of the whole. Notions of resilience presented in "numerous guises and causal relationships are hard to pin down"; therefore, as an inquiry subject, resilience remains elusive to scientists (Braverman, 2001, p. 18).

However, according to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), the resilience literature of the past has been helpful in keeping alive the desire to know more about youth who succeed despite hardships of poverty that keep them from normal economic resources. Masten and Coatsworth's (1998) converging evidence from their research informs

parents as well as society that the predictor of resilience that had the power to affect change in development of competence was an environment where a child enjoyed a positive relationship with a caring adult. Rutter's (1987) work confirmed that this predictor had traction because years earlier he had come to a similar conclusion that a close relationship with a parental figure brought about positive outcomes in the lives of children who faced ordinary and extraordinary life stress.

This theory has enormous social power, as seen in Masten and Powell's (1999) paper, where they suggested that supportive programs might be the answer. In the youths' natural environment, the programs might help to reduce their exposure to particular risks and to strengthen community-based protective processes, too.

This elevated interest has manifested itself in numerous research efforts that seek to identify and understand the impact of parental incarceration on offspring, especially African-American offspring. Literature reviewed for this study resulted in identification of a substantial set of impacts on children of incarcerated parents. The commonality of impacts was considered, and the following impact considerations were set in place:

The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children

Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic children are thrust on the public stage due to their parents' incarceration, and they are left behind at the mercy of others (Simmons, 2003). Life changes for them after incarceration, and the negative consequences they must face lead to disruption "often more than once" (Braman, 2002; Simmons, 2003, p. 10;). According to Bernstein (2005), they "forfeit, too often their homes, their safety, their public status and private self-image, their primary source of comfort and affection" (p. 4).

Recognizing children are vulnerable during the period of separation, we must look at the issues that confront them.

The Impact of Legally Ambiguous Circumstances

The literature review focused closely on the legal issues faced by children of incarcerated parents.

Incarcerations of their parents cause children to face otherwise unnecessary legal interference in their lives. The impact of public policies frequently exacerbates the new life-change of children and causes inconsistency with their right to be safe and happy (Schirmer, Nellis, & Mauer, 2009). Legally ambiguous circumstances occur and children find themselves vulnerable as they face issues that hinder their growth, psychologically, socially, and emotionally (Barry, Ginchild, & Lee, 1995).

The Impact of Indifference

Studies indicate that, nationwide, children with incarcerated parents view the legal system through a negative lens. According to Travis et al. (2003) and Simmons (2000), the children feel invisible. The current research evidence suggests that law-enforcement agencies and frontline service providers have been derelict in their duties because the people who should make "legal arrangements for custody, and care of children are not responsive to the special needs of these children as they should be" (Barry, Ginchild, & Lee, 1995, p. 147). As a result, children and families feel unprotected in the crisis of parental arrest and incarceration (San Francisco Partnership, 2003).

Recently, Charlene Simmons (2003) reviewed her California Research Bureau's report indicating that "law enforcement practices, criminal court procedures, sentencing

laws, and correctional practices designed to catch, convict and punish prisoners also have a major, but not generally well understood, impact on children" (p. 9).

Simmons (2003) acknowledged that there are quite a large number of minor children in the state who have been left behind due to parental incarceration. Yet there are "limited direction" and "no clear policies" available to give guidance on how to ensure children's safety (p. 9). In 2002, Marcus Nieto reminded us that California's actions mirror those of many other states. Law-enforcement agents lack protocols and/or policies to ensure children are placed with "suitable caretakers." He noted that a majority of officers in the field place children but take no responsibility for what might happen to them (p. 29). Nieto (2002) stated that, without accountability, police officers aren't motivated to ask adults while they are being arrested if they have any children.

Simmons (2003) cited an extreme case to make the point about this "statutory hole" children are in because most law-enforcement authorities consider incarceration a "family affair" (p. 9). She cited an Illinois case involving a police officer that magnified the lack of protection for children of prisoners. The officer showed deliberate indifference when he pulled over a car and arrested the adult occupant and never thought to look at the back seat. He left a young child alone at night in that car, putting the child's life at risk. This was a demonstration of a bigger problem that went beyond the officer, although he was found "guilty of violating the child's civil rights under federal law" (p. 23).

The Impact of Termination of Parental Rights

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA, 1997) is an example of a law that was supposed to bring about positive change in the safe care of children. But in 1997, the

ASFA had inmate parents scared because authorization was given to states to terminate parental rights permanently (Baunach, 1985; Hairston, Wills, & Wall, 1997; Johnston, 1995a; Simmons, 2003). The termination was based on the 15/22 rule. If a child had spent 15 of the last 22 months in foster care, then he was considered abandoned, and so he or she could be permanently separated from family through adoption by a new family. Originally, the mandate was to make a reasonable effort to preserve families by keeping them intact (Roberts, 2002).

Hardest hit by the 1997 federal bill have been incarcerated parents, especially African-Americans who lose parental rights because they have the longest sentences (Mumola, 2000; National Black Child Development Institute, 1989; Treadwell, 2009). The facts support that ASFA accelerates the process of adoption. The concern to mothers especially is that ASFA law in practice makes no reasonable effort in most of the 50 states to preserve families. Loss of parental rights is such a concern that many mothers not only do not trust the system, they remain quiet about having children when they are arrested because of the great fear of losing them to the juvenile courts or to foster care (Simmons, 2003; Travis, McBride-Cincotta, & Solomon, 2005). Some mothers will give false information to keep their children out of reach so that they can remain in family care (LaVigne et al., 2008).

Many child-welfare experts believe that ASFA has gone far beyond its goal and by giving the states financial incentives has quickened the pace of adoption without regard to the diminished parental relationships (Roberts, 2002). Therefore, the federal policy harms children because it splits up families.

The Issue Impacting Temporary Guardianship

Temporary guardianship is a complicated issue because the family members, neighbors, or friends of inmate mothers who willingly take on the role of temporary parents have no legal protection. Those individuals have little or no control over the legal issues associated with caring for these children. In most cases, the children can be removed from their care at any time. The children are in difficult situations because they are taken in an erratic fashion to homes that lack resources and proper care (Seymour, 1999). Once again, the children's safety and well-being are overlooked (Bernstein, 2005; LaVigne et al., 2008).

The data supplied by U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000) indicated that the nation had over 5 million households headed by grandparents, with 2.4 million grandchildren living with them due partly to incarceration. Specifically, more than half of motherless children live with a grandparent. On a daily basis, grandparents face "grieving children and unpaid bills" (Bernstein, 2005, p. 110). According to Hanlon et al. (2007), it is a fact that support services are "frequently inaccessible both culturally and physically to the grandparents most in need" (p. 354).

Empirical studies report that all poor families suffer many of the same problems related to parental incarceration, regardless of ethnic makeup of the community. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' data (Mumola, 2000), many African-American grandparents are living in disadvantaged environments and poverty, with usually low fixed income and with access to few resources (Gibson, 2002; LaPointe, Picker, Harris, & Spencer, 1985; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). They are the ones who carry the heaviest burden. Yet they soon discover that they have no "legal structure" over

custodial care (Gabel & Johnston, 1995, p. 156). They have very few legal options that give necessary support for their minor grandchildren (Bernstein, 2005; Dressel & Barnhill, 1990; LaPointe et al., 1985). The legal roadblocks for these grandparents set in motion the suffering of grandchildren, developmentally and otherwise, over their entire lives (Bryson & Casper, 1999; Johnston, 2001).

Past research often suggests that the grandmothers are conflicted because they are ill-prepared to become parents again (LaPointe et al., 1985). However, African-American grandmothers see very few options for their grandchildren, and so they take on this responsibility. They are determined to keep their grandchildren from entering foster care. Many are adamant about keeping their grandchildren far from trouble (Johnston & Gabel, 1995; McCubbin et al., 1998). There is some evidence Barry (1989) insisted that shows grandmothers are stabilizers for their grandchildren "to share resources and to prevent another generation from cycling into the criminal justice system" (p. 155).

Phillips and Bloom (2001) restated the problems in this way:

> Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs were not designed with grandparents in mind. Grandparents and other relatives avoid involvement with the child welfare system altogether because of the great fear of removal of children from their care. The Aid to Families with Dependent children (AFDC) public policy changes in the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P. L. 104-193) have escalated the difficulty in obtaining help. (p. 67)

Recently, studies indicated that children go in silence to their new home environments, and many times they are looking for some small thing to give them a sense of control and "optimism" (Bernstein, 2003, p. 5). The uncertainty caused by legal issues and environmental circumstances leaves them feeling powerless and drained (Bernstein, 2003).

The Impact of Becoming More Vulnerable

Children are overlooked too many times during a parent's arrest, and they are caught in the middle of the activity that removes their mother or father from their lives, either quietly or with violent force (Puddefoot & Foster, 2007). The children's safety and happiness are in jeopardy because too many times they are left alone at home to fend for themselves while their parents are taken to police stations. Often a neighbor comes to rescue the abandoned children. There are other times when the arresting authorities collect and transport the children in silence to strangers at shelters (San Francisco Partnership, 2003). The children feel powerless because they perceive that they have no input or control over any part of their lives. San Francisco Partnership (2003) notes that the researchers acknowledge the children's desire to be heard in courtrooms during their parents' sentencing because any decision made in those rooms affects their lives, too.

Far too often, these children feel like criminals themselves and experience emotional trauma that produces "tremendous fear and guilt." As a result, children are so traumatized by the whole experience of losing their parents to prison and the "response and procedures" they have to face that they suffer negative, long-term consequences (Foster, 2008, p. 17; Simmons, 2003). The adults who should come to their rescue to protect them instead fail them, and so they are left behind feeling alienated, sometimes abandoned on street corners to provide for themselves (Bernstein, 2005).

Children have been known to remain silent because the pain of losing any parent to prison is too great for them to share with others. They fear their futures because of the negative labels that they rightfully assume the public attaches to incarceration; indeed, the labels are attached to them in communities (Phillips & Bloom, 2001). On most

occasions, they blame themselves for the incarceration of their parents (Bernstein, 2003; Braman, 2004).

Research indicates that inner-city impoverished minor children live among neighbors who feel the effect of their parents' removal because they see their community being depleted of human resources. To the neighbors, incarceration fosters unhealthy environments for all (Travis & Waul, 2003). Young lives are being changed through the absence of parental physical and home care (Bernstein, 2005). Overnight, children see their families splintered and relationships strained. They have no control over being pulled from siblings and placed in worse situations (Braman, 2004; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999).

On the average, two children are left behind when a mother is imprisoned. This fact is serious enough for researchers to understand the value of direct contact with the children (Lengyel & Harris, 2003; Simmons, 2000). "How do children fare?" is a question they cannot accurately answer. Small studies have reported that most inmate mothers are single parents and the primary caretakers, and they are the cause for an enormous amount of disruption in the lives of their children (George & LaLonde, 2002; Hairston, 2001).

The parent-child disconnection due to incarceration punishes children. After interviewing a significant number of youth left behind, Bernstein (2005) reported that children of prisoners have a "right to a family" that is intact (p. 270). Nell Bernstein insisted that children "hunger for attachment, the stubborn pull of the blood connection" (p. 270). However, she found that several studies acknowledged the numerous shifts in the family structures causing children, especially those of school age, to feel insecure

about the attachments to inmate parents and other adults in their physical environments. They seem not to be able to have healthy relationships with peers, and their cognition skills suggest that they will perform poorly (Sroufe, 1988).

In the United States, children of incarcerated parents face a separation barrier from their parents of legal interference, one that does not support maintaining relationships with them. Most certainly, the parent-child contact should be seen as uninterrupted ("On Prisoners and Parenting," 1978). According to Hairston (2008), many scholars voice concern that without prison visitation, which can calm fears and give children a feeling of connection with the inmate parents, children begin to regard their parents as strangers. A diminished parent relationship potentially makes the adjustment more challenging for children, especially when they begin to question their parents' affections.

The breakdown in the quality of attachment happens too often because most prisons are located far from urban communities. Children have a difficult time sustaining connectedness to an inmate mother or father who is housed at least 100 miles from them in rustic areas (Adalist-Estrin & Mustin, 2003). Prisoners' children usually reside in poor families who are without their own transportation and sufficient funds. In most cases, the children are at the mercy of their temporary caregivers. The caregivers may seldom make an effort to get the children to a prison to visit a parent (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Unfortunately, many children who are left behind never see their inmate parents in person because of the impediments. This is considered a breakdown in the quality of the parent-child relationship (Genty, 2003). It can be said that the parent-child relationship falls

victim to an uncaring system. In many cases, the local juvenile courts become the children's custodial parents (Mumola, 2000).

In the case of strangers, studies have suggested the need for input from children about plans being made on their behalf (Beckerman, 2001; Bernstein, 2003). It is possible that children see strangers as enemies because they believe that those adults are guilty of separating them from their parents. Before the courts get them, it may be kinder to involve the children in the plans for their care, regardless of whether those plans call for strangers becoming temporary guardians, or extended family acting as guardians with adoption as a permanent solution (Beckerman, 2001; Bernstein, 2003).

The trauma of parental incarceration is not a normal event, and documented research confirms that incarceration affects children's normal emotional development with all its psychological overtones (Braverman, 2001).

Minor children struggle with living abnormally under high stress that brings higher anxiety (Waul et al., 2002). Recent studies indicate that many children suffer needlessly and complain to no one about their feelings of abandonment and anger.

Children feel frustrated about their situations. Scared, rejected, and lonely, these children are not prepared for the unique challenges of their new life. They find themselves poorer (Braman, 2004) and are more likely to be disruptive, aggressive, and delinquent. Additionally, they are unable to sustain peer relationships, earn passing grades, or avoid incarceration themselves (Hairston, 2009; Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006; Travis & Waul, 2003). Their lives are now filled with absolute uncertainty.

Hertzman and Power (2003) support a somewhat popular line of thinking coming from published research (Correctional Association of New York, 1993) that suggests children benefit from nurturing in order to survive psychologically. They are convinced that children who receive this psychological healthy start by the age of 6 thrive and have fewer social problems, better school grades, better self-esteem and fewer health problems, and are less likely to be involved in crime.

The Emotional Impact

While the effects differ due to age and ethnic differences, the consequences for a child are life-changing and they have longevity (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000, 2008). The influence of parental incarceration brings extreme stress to children in general, but boys seem to be more vulnerable to the changes than are girls. Some preliminary studies indicate that girls exhibit sadness while boys display hostility. Therefore, it is possible that girls fare better when parents are incarcerated (Poehlmann, 2005). Graham, Harris, and Carpenter (2010) remind us that "a child's experiences of separation from a mother may vary from the child's experiences of paternal separation" (p. 7). The reason for this is that most children live with mothers.

Kampfner (1995) used her study to attempt to isolate the impact inmate mothers have on their minor children when separation takes place. She took two groups of children and contrasted children of incarceration with children whose mothers were absent from the homes but not in prison. Kampfner was looking for significant adjustment differences. The children in the incarceration group were unable to adjust to their new lives. The children reported that they had experienced trauma from the exposure of the terrifying event of parental imprisonment, and the feeling of anxiety had

never left them. The separation had caused undue stress, and the children were not emotionally connected to their new surrogate parent. Signs of post-traumatic stress disorder were seen in the observation, and the evidence was confirmed by the burst of anger, flashbacks, and guilt coming from the children. Kampfner's (1995) findings are consistent with prior theory and research of the causal relationship between parental incarceration and social development.

A review of early studies suggests that the social challenges facing children with incarcerated parents are associated with a range of difficulties that could possibly paralyze them in the way they develop emotionally (Robertson, 2007). Researchers have only begun to discover the "far-reaching effects of imprisonment beyond prison walls" (Murray, 2005, p. 442). The psychological burdens influence many aspects of the children's behavior. Several studies (Baunach, 1985; Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981; Kampfner, 1995; Michigan Briefing Report, 2002; Walker, 2005) suggest that the impact of parental imprisonment is so great that promising children fall victim to inappropriate patterns of behavior early and by so doing bring difficulties on an already troubled life. The unsavory behavior never stops and is seen displayed in adult years.

According to Nieto (2002), "multiple psychological problems" occur often enough to be alarming (p. 10). Simmons (2000) reminds us that the external manifestations can lead to the "use of drugs or alcohol" (p. 4). Prominent researchers Reed and Reed (1997), Kampfner (1995), Hungerford (1993), and Gabel (1992) highlighted more than a decade ago this needless suffering, and they concluded that sometimes the children's psychological reactions lead to a belief that their lives are unalterable. It is common for these children to have low self-esteem and be depressed and

emotionally withdrawn from friends and family during their parents' absences (Bernstein, 2005; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Johnston, 2004; Robertson, 2007; Seymour, 1998).

The Mental Impact

Documented research suggests that during their parents' incarceration children are at risk for mental health problems that affect their performance in school (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Murray, 2005). However, Murray (2005) presents his investigation as evidence that scholars still face limitations on the events experienced by this vulnerable population because "children of prisoners are almost entirely neglected in academic research" (p. 442).

LaVigne et al. (2008) and Sanders, Merrell, and Cobb (1999) agree that there are high risks, and in many cases children develop mental disorders because they live constantly in fear of instability and lack confidence in those around them. These psychological changes forced upon them bring harmful internal struggles. The collateral consequences of the children's mental inability to cope leave them with a broad range of emotions (Michigan Briefing Report, 2002). Literature documented that a great number of African-American children succumb to the elevated mental stress and dramatically exhibit troubling behaviors such as eating infrequently or too much (Bernstein, 2005; Johnston, 2004). Sometimes the stress just makes them regress further emotional and mentally (Hairston, 2007; Kampfner, 1995; Travis & Waul, 2004).

Studies have consistently documented the "enduring trauma" that leaves children with an "impaired ability to overcome future trauma (Johnston, 1995b, p. 68). Multiple exposures to this social problem of parental incarceration, and without family support, children succumb to the pressure and react poorly; mentally unable to cope.

The Impact of Monetary Deficit

Just over a decade ago, Reed and Reed (1997) concluded that studies on American's criminal justice system inadvertently condemned minor children of incarcerated parents by neglecting to consider their needs.

One such need is to live with less uncertainty within the family unit. Too often children are living in households teetering on financial collapse after parental incarceration. The loss of income from the incarcerated parent exacerbates an already burdensome situation, and the strain can cause poor parenting by the custodial caregiver to surface. Some studies suggest that this financial crisis negatively affects the children's emotional and social skills later in life (Braman & Wood, 2003).

The other stressful problem for the children is that so many of their parents are high-school dropouts, and their limited education negatively affects their ability to satisfy their own and their children's multiple needs. The parent left behind has few options to earn a decent wage to take good care of them (Braman, 2004; Brazzell, 2008; Griess, 2007; Johnston, 1995b; Martone, 2005; Mumola, 2000).

The Impact of Exposure to Abuse

Another problem that puts children at risk is their inmate mothers arrested for an "economic-related crime" and, during their imprisonment, they turn their offspring over to strangers or neighbors for care. The children are left defenseless and subjected to threatening conditions of neglect, drugs, and other problematic behaviors (Nieto, 2002, p. 10). Newspaper stories frequently cite the "abuse and even the death of children" who are left with unfit caregivers (Nieto, 2002, p. 33).

The Impact of Increased Risk for Antisocial and Delinquent Problems

Ziebert (2006) argues that "incarceration is not a socially approved form of separation. It brings stigma consequences for children and all races have been affected to some degree" (p. 6). There is limited consideration in the literature of millions of children facing daily antisocial reactions to parental imprisonment that lead them to act out inappropriately (Johnston, 1995c; Kampfner, 1995; Sack, Seidler, & Thomas, 1976).

Interest has risen in this area recently, and some researchers address the academic failure of these children in their studies and publicize the troubling signs that they have uncovered. For instance, it is a fact that parental incarceration saddles the children with negative conditions and through the process of trying to cope, some children have difficulty concentrating in school, thereby setting in motion the possibility of failure (Eddy & Reid, 2002; Simmons, 2000). Prior work by Kampfner (1991) confirms that there is reason to sound an alarm. She reports that there are large numbers of suspended adolescents and dropouts—actually, too many to be ignored—and it seems to be directly linked to parental incarceration. Trice and Brewster (2004) suggest that the dropout rates are astonishing for children whose mothers never graduated from high school or pursued a GED before incarceration.

Children feel the stigma from their teachers and fellow students (Travis & Waul, 2003). Since the studies are few, it is essential to point out that most information about their problems rarely comes from them (Seymour, 1998). Sack et al.'s 1976 inquiry examined a very small clinical study that extracted all information from children. William Sack and his fellow researchers found that over 50% of the boys engaged in deviant behavior right after their fathers were locked up. Incarceration makes the boys

vulnerable and unable to adjust to their new situation; their grades plummet, and they exhibit aggression. Ziebert (2006) adds that the Sack et al. (1976) study revealed that the boys' behavior deteriorated quickly, from common disturbance in classrooms to "school truancy to running away, to theft, and attacking classmates" (p. 4).

Stimulated by internal negative feelings, children will externalize enough to change the course of their academic life through failure to meet expectations in school. Children become unproductive and destructive in the classrooms. Their negative behavior is a sign that they are struggling and feeling inadequate to cope (Ziebert, 2006). A recent study by Travis and Waul (2003) suggests that the downward spiral happens because their self-esteem is low. It seems as if only negative things happen to them. As the children become older, the teasing by their peers becomes a distraction and the ostracization by the same classmates pushes them to make the poor decision to drop out of school. In many cases, if they don't leave, they are suspended because of antisocial behavior (Davis & Newell, 2008; Sack et al., 1976; Stanton, 1980).

In recognition of conduct problems, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, and Green (1991) suggest that their investigation uncovers the connection between constantly repeated inappropriate conduct children exhibit during elementary school years and the escalation of adult behavior that is considered criminal. A number of researchers suggest that academic problems are a definite marker for other problems, including drug abuse in the teen years that carries over to adulthood. The consequences for deviating from the norm in society affect others (Hawkins, 1995; Howell, 1995). Furthermore, research indicates that, in the future, these children most likely will be problem employees, more so than their peers. It is more than likely that incarceration effects will be so prominent in

the children's lives that they will become parents without learning how to parent (Farrington, 1991; Roenkae & Pulkkinen, 1995).

There is limited empirical research on the impact inmate mothers have on their children, and this is a cause for concern because they usually are the custodial parents (Mumola, 2000). It is assumed that these children may experience school failure along with inappropriate social behaviors (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Katz, 1998). Dalley's (2002) Montana empirical study of 44 inmate mothers and their children exposed problems for both mothers and children. In examining the children, Dalley found that some of them experienced school changes multiple times, and this was seen by the children to be linked to maternal incarceration.

Many criminologists believe that parental incarceration damages children and exposes them to behaviors that lead them to commit crimes. Over several decades, criminologists continued to see a pattern of greater deviant behavior when parents were imprisoned, and the evidence shows that children's futures remain in jeopardy. The criminologists' early findings lean toward the intergenerational aspect of arrest and delinquency of children who have criminal parents as their role models (Baker, Mack, Moffitt, & Mednick, 1989; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; McCord, 1990, 1991; Robins, 1979).

There is a wide enough consensus for concern about children being exposed to prison through visitation, especially when those sounding the alarm believe that the experience of visiting encourages the children to break the law and become part of the same system through their own incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Experts in the criminology field have followed the paths of many children of prisoners and have drawn

similar conclusions that many children of prisoners will commit crimes and have dim futures (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Robins, 1979).

A new body of research focuses on the conduct problems of minorities who are less educated and poor. The social disadvantages seem to lead to intergenerational patterns of criminality of the groups' children who end up incarcerated (Roettger, 2008). Simmons's (2000) research uncovered that within this group 1 in 10 children will be an inmate before reaching adulthood. In an earlier work, Johnston (1995b) offered "a compelling picture," seen in Table 1, of the major shifts in delinquency in the children's lives after the event of parental imprisonment (p. 67).

Table 1

Delinquency Among Children of Prisoners

Study	**Delinquency**	**Gang Involvement**	**Incarceration**
Glueck & Glueck (1950)	45.6%	Not measured	Not measured
McCord & McCord (1958)	60.0%	Not measured	Not measured
Sack, Seidler, & Thomas (1976)	12.2%	Not measured	Not measured
Stanton (1980)	24.0%	Not measured	Not measured
Johnston (1991)	Not measured	Not measured	10.0%
Johnston (1992)	29.6%	22.2%	Not measured

Note. From *Effects of Parental Incarceration* (p. 67), by K. Gabel and D. Johnston, 1995, New York: Lexington Books.

Bernstein (2005) reported on the Massachusetts study, just one of the studies conducted over the years. It focused on delinquent boys of the 1930s and 1940s and found that "two-thirds of those boys had criminal fathers and 40% had criminal grandfathers" (p. 213). Bernstein (2005) also found in her own case studies that many children who had an imprisoned parent or other criminal family member lived up to the negative expectations of authority figures and the labels placed upon them by continuing the cycle of crime and arrest. A case subject in a youth facility in California wrote:

> I got my dad and brother and cousin locked up. Even when I was in my mom's stomach, she was locked up, and when I was born she was locked up, so I feel like I was born to the system. . . . I figure it's like a never-ending curse that can't be stopped and keeps on getting passed down. (p. 216)

According to Reed and Reed (1997), veteran prison guards had great awareness of inmate parents continually sharing prison life with their children. Even children and grandchildren have been behind bars together. The essence of Reed and Reed's (1997) argument is that the criminal justice experience of intergenerational criminality highlights profoundly the seriousness of the impact of parental incarceration on generations of children. Several studies (Beatty, 1997; Johnston & Carlin, 1996; Simmons, 2000; Weissman & LaRue, 2001) suggest that intergenerational incarceration further unravels the families' social standing in communities and leaves behind hardships and multiple risks for the children.

The Impacts of Social Stigma and Isolation

Scholars such as Lowenstein (1986), Kampfner (1991), and Sack et al. (1976) emphasized that the stigma effect is real. Lowenstein (1986) argued that incarceration has "demoralization and stigma attached to it" (p. 79). Kampfner (1991) suggested that her

work with children in one particular prison provided invaluable information about the stigma felt at schools. The teasing was most hurtful and caused great pain. Sack et al.'s 1976 study provided evidence to attest to the stigma of incarceration's effect on children's lives. Their investigation revealed that it was acutely felt in one-third of the sample families and was seen in their effort to cover up the incarceration issue by keeping silent. Sack and his colleagues were convinced that to these families, incarceration was a "shameful and unspeakable event" (p. 621).

Thus it is possible that the stigma effect on children has much to do with how individual families view incarceration (Gabel, 1992). More than 15 years ago, Johnston (1995b) wrote that families unfamiliar with the justice system through no prior contact find incarceration extremely hard to process. Gabel (1992) suggests that culture and background play a significant role in shaping reactions. For instance, Black families view the incarceration stigma as proof of "social prejudice" (p. 35). It follows, then, that it is not uncommon for African-American children to feel socially isolated because their immediate environmental social networks have broken down due to incarceration (Roberts, 2004). They tune in to stigmatization because they perceive that the wider society considers them socially inferior, and so they accept the label and suffer internally and act out externally (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Hagan, 1996; Johnston, 1995b; Robertson, 2007; Simmons, 2000).

According to Oliver Robertson (2007), there are some cases when "children may derive social cachet from their association with criminality" (p. 13). He believes that minority groups feel the stigma from parental imprisonment much greater than any other group because of the color of their skin and the internal struggles within their own group

that can lead to them being "ostracized" (p. 13). This leaves them in an environment without the needed support.

Moreover, most children rebel because they feel deceived about the actual situation. Family members or their trusted guardians have a tendency to give misinformation or simply hide the truth about their parents' incarceration. They take on the added stress of feeling uncertain about their lives because of the deceit (Hairston, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2004).

What is obviously felt by all children of prisoners is the pressure caused by the emotional and social burdens, the anxiety of suddenly being stripped of their source of security, and the suffering. Many of them desire acceptance from the world (Bernstein, 2005; Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2006; Ziebert, 2006). Some researchers focus on the social institutions that willfully exclude the children, leaving them isolated and feeling the shame and guilt of being sons and daughters of prisoners (Hagan, 1996). Research evidence suggests that there is a connection between the range of social problems impacting the children and the intergenerational problems that vary in complexity and severity.

The Impact of Parental Incarceration on African Americans

African American Defined

African-American identity is more than physical characteristics; it is a shared "historical cultural base" that is complicated (Swarns, 2004, p. 3). From a historical perspective, African Americans have "strong religious orientations" (Harry, 1992, p. 50). However, African Americans have had to evolve into a co-existing people, forced to adapt and resemble the wider society due to a growing middle class who are educated and

economically stable (Thorton, Tran, & Taylor, 1997). The flight of this group to non-urban communities has led to the erosion of financial and social stability among those left behind in cities (Bernstein, 2005; Hairston, 1991).

Bernstein (2005) is alarmed that "we have chosen to enforce the social order in a way that undermines the family structure of entire communities" (p. 269). African-American families see parental incarceration adding to their woes. They are of the inclination to believe that the traditional strong relational bonds are under attack. Most children and families hate the social stigma attached to parental incarceration, so they avoid the subject, thereby embracing their cultural stance of remaining silent (Adalist-Estrin, 2003; Bernstein, 2005; Travis et al., 2003).

African-American children face a domino effect due in part to poor quality of life and the loss of so many fathers. Prison takes away their needed financial support, and having it suddenly end causes uncertainty and disruption for custodial mothers in their "ability to care for the children" (Travis & Waul, 2003, p. 18). A more substantial impact is felt when the fathers co-parent and live with their families. It is not uncommon for the children to be under great stress after the incarceration because they see their mothers having such difficulty in adjusting to their new roles as sole providers.

Disproportional Involvement of African-American Children

Existing research notes that African Americans are registered to be 12% of the general population. In comparison to other racial or ethnic groups, their size is considered small. Yet they are the largest inmate group in state or federal prisons. Their numbers have tripled over the last two decades. In our zeal to rid society of offenders, children—especially Black children—became the unspoken victims of crime and punishment

(Bernstein, 2005). The disparities have been documented, and so have the escalated problems of Black children. Having examined these multiple risks, several researchers believe that these children are nine times more likely than their White counterparts to have a parent in prison (Krisberg & Engel-Temin, 2001; Pew Charitable Trust, 2009). Today, not only do African-American children face physical separation in greater numbers than other racial groups, but incarceration demands of them awareness of their loss. Sometimes the children grieve as if it were the "social death of the loved one" (Arditti, 2005, p. 253; Poehlmann, 2005).

Admittedly, African-American children are among an estimated 10 million people who experience life without one or both parents during periods of childhood due to incarceration (Hairston, 2007). About 6.7% of their whole group faces this collateral consequence of arrest, sentencing, and incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). African-American children are subjected to the loss of their parents for long periods due to mandatory sentences in state (12 years) and federal prisons (10 years), leaving them feeling punished as they mourn their disconnection (Adalist-Estrin, 2003; Mumola, 2000; Travis et al., 2003).

African-American children of prisoners are living in inner cities. Typically, the average age is 8 years old for experiencing the multiple adverse conditions of life without a parent due to incarceration (Walker, 2005). Some studies suggest that if they experience parental incarceration at 6 years old or younger, they will be twice as likely to commit a criminal act at some period of their lives and end up by adulthood in the criminal justice system (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008). If the current trend of mass incarceration

continues, “one of every three black boys born can expect to go to prison” (Mauer, 2004, p. 131).

The realities of the damaging effects such as “witnessing older brothers, cousins, and neighbors cycling in and out of prison” have researchers contending that prison has become a “rite of passage” for African-American children of incarcerated parents (Mauer, 2004, p. 131). In fact, their particular hardships carry a penalty of higher risks each day during their parents’ incarceration (Lengyel & Harris, 2003). Bernstein (2005) claimed to have uncovered evidence that confirms the notion that incarceration is so harmful that the children’s lives are changed forever.

There are too few unfiltered reports about what really happens to these children while their parents are in prison. Nationwide, the obvious debate is over the consequences of parental incarceration and “its irreversible impact upon both parents and children. The time apart is lost forever, because a childhood can never be recovered” (Genty, 2003, p. 1671). To reiterate, in the African-American inner-city poor communities, fewer than 50% of fathers lived with their children prior to their incarceration (Mumola, 2000). It is essential to note that almost 90% of children have no household shift because their mothers remain the caregivers (Mumola, 2000). However, fathers in prison are limited to what they can do for their children, and financial support is especially missed (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009). Families still send much of their meager funds to those fathers, thereby decreasing the ability to properly care for the children (Hairston, 2007). The collect calls and long drives to prisons are additional expenses.

Another crucial situation that affects African-American children is the existing or non-existing relationships between those mothers and fathers. If attachments are strained due to fractured relationships or mothers become involved with someone else, sometimes the new relationship affects the social dynamic in the children's home, and mothers can lose control of their children. For older children, the out-of-control atmosphere within the home resulting from them not wanting mothers in new relationships can set in motion exhibition of inappropriate, antisocial behavior. They may become engaged in delinquent activity and refuse to attend high school, dropping out as most of their fathers did (Farrington, 1980; Wildeman, 2009).

Prior studies suggest that African-American children are far more likely to exhibit deviant behavior expressed in using their fists or some other aggressive behavior to solve problems. Parental incarceration is one more burden they must take on during their young lives. With such multiple disadvantages such as "low social class" status (Murray, 2007, p. 57), the children can feel out of control because they are not able to handle the challenges parental incarceration brings to their lives. Feeling powerless disrupts critical areas of development due to internalization, and such feeling reflects external problems related to bonding issues stemming from the parental separation. Some children lose themselves through the difficult times and find that they have little self-control and moral and social judgment. For them, the danger lies in their thinking; their thoughts have crippled them. When they solve their problems with their fists, they open themselves up to the future possibility of following their parents into prisons (Dalley, 2002; Greene, Haney, & Hurtado, 2000; Johnston, 1995b; Reed & Reed, 1997).

Nell Bernstein (2005) asserts that "racial disparities are far from invisible to children" (p. 61). The reality of double standards is observed by Black children, and David Cole (2000), a legal scholar, voices the Black children's sentiments by writing: "The perception and reality of double standards contribute to the crime problem by eroding the legitimacy of the criminal law and undermining a cohesive sense of community" (p. 11).

Evidence of Black children receiving cues at an early age is seen in beliefs and notions of race. According to Stevenson (1997), three themes are repeated to Black children early: (a) "protect yourself from racial hostility, (b) sense of belonging, and (c) be able to adapt or exhibit pride in one's group" (p. 51). Phinney (1990) described the adolescent ethnic identity as a process of exposure to many experiences and mothers' teachings that help individuals to adjust to the dominant culture. However, when African American youth have to face a barrage of mitigating influences constantly, the traumatic events alter their view of self.

Parental incarceration brings stigma outside of their communities through institutional prejudice and makes the children feel like social outcasts (Hairston, 2007). Because these children's world view is dominated by another race, they harbor negative feelings toward their own racial members (McMahon & Watts, 2002). Unfortunately, one of the consequences of disadvantaged lifestyles for Black male youths is that they still have to contend with the "internalization of racist attitudes" within the society. Their development is further impeded by "communal conflict" (Wilson, 1991, p. 471).

What is it like to grow up with one or both parents in prison? This question gains strength and demands some attention for African-American children because they are the

ones most affected by this social issue. They account for 50% of all children living with the knowledge that their separation from a parent is due to incarceration (Miller, 2006). Despite the risks, many African-American youths are coping and adapting successfully. There are examples of studies announcing their feat of "overcoming the odds" (Garmezy & Masten, 1986; Jenson & Fraser, 2005, p. 8; Luthar, 2003). African-American children have been especially exposed to more than their share of risks. They have been subjected to acute poverty and violence in their communities. Yet they do make it. Some seem to have the attributes needed to survive (Ungar, 2008).

Culture and Structural Impact Within the Children's World

Anderson (1996) states:

> In 1899, W.E.B. DuBois made sense of the social organization of the Philadelphia black community by developing a typology of four classes: the well-to-do; the decent hard workers, who were doing quite well; the "worthy poor," who were working or trying to work but barely making ends meet; and the "submerged tenth," who were beneath the surface of socioeconomic viability. This stratification system was seen in the social and economic context of increasing industrialization of the time. (p. 119)

From the distant past, Elijah Anderson revisited DuBois's examination of the Philadelphia Negro problem that exposed a legacy of struggle. The relevance of Anderson's (1996) study is seen in the lives of African-American children with incarcerated parents who find themselves in similar circumstances as mentioned by DuBois. Literature evidence suggests that they experience persistent poverty and struggle. Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) and Johnston (2006) argue that incarceration has caused the children to fall further behind socially and economically, and this could be part of the collateral damage. There seems to be a crisis in the culture because structural conditions are favoring the continuation of the disadvantage. Basically, the urban

communities are beset with "chronic lawlessness," joblessness, drug abuse, despair, and name-calling labels, such as "underclass," that daily plague African-American children (Patterson, 1995, p. 237). Moreover, many have to contend with the harsher realities of their imprisoned parents being undereducated and mentally unstable. Therefore their futures look bleak (Johnston, 2006; Lengyel & Harris, 2003).

Significant longitudinal data from the Great Smoky Mountain study confirms what many researchers currently believe: that parental incarceration is associated with "family instability and economic strain, which are known risk factors for poor child outcomes" (Herman-Stahl et al., 2008, p. 4; Johnston, 2006). Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2001) insist that these children are also exposed to family violence before an arrest of a parent, and all of the other circumstances faced by the children add to the crippling effect. In conclusion, this population is without the building blocks of productive life (Murray, 2005).

Some Available Resources

These are the resources that guided the children and helped them overcome their difficult situation. The human interactions and religious influences played a significant role in their survival.

The Impact of Religion and Spirituality

African Americans have maintained a culture that is rooted deeply in religion and spirituality. The prominence of these two values within Black communities is supported by studies conducted empirically, and reports of the data results in 1999 suggest that 80% of the population consider religious stance to be of great importance. According to Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln (1999), African Americans favor seeking comfort through

religion. These findings are validated by other research confirming that religion and spirituality have functioned as transformers, bringing support to enrich Black people's lives (Watts, 2003).

Franklin Frasier (1974) argued his view of religion's historical importance by revealing African Americans' strong connection to the experience of believing that arose from their need to find respite from hostile forces of a different ethnic persuasion. Frasier (1974) insists that the roots of the Black church have always been planted firmly within the Black community. The church remains influential in Black people's lives and guides thinking in social, political, and economic matters. However, the church stands out in importance in the lives of the disadvantaged because they are remembered and served by that institution, and thereby it remains viable and a place with a purpose.

Billingsley (1992) presents a portrait of how African Americans evolved and the forces behind their shaping:

> The history of family life among the African-American people is a history of struggle. It is a struggle to keep life and limb, and body and soul together. It is filled with inordinate hardships and handicaps. This same history, however, is a lesson in endurance. It is a history of overcoming obstacles, of turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones. And because of high value placed on kinship and community, the struggle to maintain and enhance family and the sense of belonging and of well-being which it fosters often brings forth the best efforts. . . . Stepping stones exist at every level of the social structure. Social support may come from a friend, neighbors, and even strangers, or from community institutions such as the church. (p. 314)

Reflecting on his people, Billingsley (1992) writes that there are examples of African-American people in his life experience who continue to exhibit the cultural strengths of their ancestors in their everyday lives and exemplify the resilience of a people. In his book, Billingsley (1992) stressed that, traditionally, African-American families hold on to common values and beliefs that are tied always to the church. He sees

no reason why today's single-parent households cannot rise above "the constraints of their status" (p. 334).

A later study by Sudarkasa (1997) paints a dimmer picture of the same contemporary African-American families. She expresses concern for family values fading from everyday life because of high stressful conditions threatening the very existence of family structures. She emphasizes that the values that will lead to reverence for spiritual things might not be present today. It is already clear that the values that sustain a people are not found in every family. She believes that "a revival of the values that allowed them to persist could strengthen the family and community structures on which African-Americans must depend in the twenty-first century" (p. 32).

When African-American families become troubled due to parental incarceration, religion and the church's influences take on greater significance because of the negative social condition those families must face. Since the early 1990s, the "nature, patterns and functions of religious involvement among African-Americans has been a topic of interest" (Chatters et al., 1999, p. 132). As much as incarceration affects the children and their families, most of the time religion remains an important part of their lives. Researchers have found this aspect of African-American lives to be a social-support need. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, are usually members of churches that nurture their culture and provide them with respite from the troubles of incarceration. Children are targeted and help may be given through prison ministries. Such ministry is the link that can foster "stability and connectedness" within a family and help prepare them for the inmate parent's release (Chatters & Taylor, 1988; Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007, p. 11).

The Impact of Schools

Billingsley (1992) makes it clear in his writings that African Americans have had a thirst for seeing their children and themselves achieve academically. To prove that his study of them has validity, Billingsley (1992) returns to the middle of the 1800s and paints a picture, with the help of others, of the legacy of one school that depicts African Americans' zest for education and the role that can be played by schools to bring about positive change.

For the express purpose of recording history, Idella Childs in 2008 wrote about what one school did for so many when excellence was sought. The year was 1867, and ex-slaves saw an opportunity to give their children more. A crippled Union soldier had opened the door to learning and in an "impoverished and culturally deprived county in the very 'Heart of Dixie,' in Perry County, Alabama, a small band of rural black people took it upon themselves to open a school called 'Lincoln Normal School'" (p. 1).

Because of the times, the school had a controversial history, but its legacy of producing achievers overrode the negative aspects of oppression. More recently, Billingsley (1992), along with Childs (2008), kept the focus on the materially poor ex-slaves, exposing their resilience in their quest for learning. The freedmen were so desirous for this new opportunity that they even physically stood guard at night at the home of their dedicated Northern teachers to keep them out of harm's way. Their mission was to assure that nothing would stop the learning from taking root in their community. They were committed to education, and they were determined that their children would not "grow up in ignorance" (p. 3).

By the time the school closed in 1970, it was known for its close relation with the church. Its first principal was a minister, and in the early years, the church played a vital role in helping to keep teachers in classrooms and the doors open. The little school was open for 100 years and produced an extraordinary number of high achievers who went on to become doctors of philosophy (Childs, 2008).

For impoverished African-American youth today, home life is so often unstable, due to the history of incarceration incidences of parents that schools become havens. The schools can be a valuable source of stability and support for these children (Davis & Newell, 2008). However, very few reports aim to raise awareness on how to work with this population, although the largest numbers of children are now in school systems (Petsch & Rochlen, 2009). It is critical that school personnel take a broader perspective in order to help teachers and staff recognize and meet needs by "validating children's experiences, and promoting better solutions for children in the classroom and at home" (Petsch & Rochlen, 2009, p. 6).

Families need school support (Council on Crime and Justice, 2006). Most findings suggest that children become burdens to family members who feel forced into an unacceptable parental role (Travis et al., 2003). The children's voices are not heard because caretaker family members are too busy trying to remain economically afloat. Acute poverty does not help to reduce the strain or adjust to new stress in their lives. Often they cannot afford to care what the children think or feel because if they do, they have to face ugly realities. This is a disruption in their lives, and they look to hear outside voices committing to support them. Most times, the children feel like they are in the

shadows, ignored and languishing in a world not of their making (Bernstein, 2005; San Francisco Partnership, 2003).

Research studies have documented the need for input from children (Beckerman, 2001; Bernstein, 2003). The studies emphasize having consideration for the child's age and level of development as life-changing plans are being made on their behalf. They cannot perceive kindness extended to them from strangers whom they consider the enemy because they silently believe that they are guilty of separating them from their parents. It has been found to be crucial to consult them about the "goals and plans" that involve their care, regardless of whether those plans call for their temporary care by strangers, or for extended family acting as guardians with adoption looming as a permanent arrangement (Beckerman, 2001, p. 49; see also Bernstein, 2003).

Recent studies indicate that the children go in silence to shelter environments, where life becomes worse. Feeling unwelcome in this strange new world, they begin to feel powerlessness once more, and over time, feelings take over and drain them emotionally. To be offered a voice within the system or their family unit on some small thing would give them a sense of control and "optimism" (Bernstein, 2003, p. 5). The feeling of being dominated by an uncaring group of adults does not inspire the best from the children. They say that they have a right to be heard (San Francisco Partnership, 2003).

The San Francisco Partnership makes a case for the children in its September 2003 report. The report is a positive step toward making sure that the children's well-being is of the utmost importance in the minds of caregivers. It suggests that adults need to listen to them without judgment and learn lessons from their experiences. The children

feel powerless because they perceive that they have no input or control over any part of their lives. The report notes that they yearn to be heard in courtrooms during their parents' sentencing because the decisions made in those rooms affect their lives, too.

Summary

In summary, chapter 2 presented a review of the literature that covered the scope of the problem, followed by the two theoretical frameworks and the set of impacts on children of incarcerated parents. It laid the groundwork for looking at how African-American offspring of incarcerated parents survive and become resilient.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Parental incarceration rips apart interpersonal attachments and isolates children. It causes children to feel unprotected and results in them falling prey to patterns of behavior that lead to intergenerational criminality (Arditti, 2005; Mumola, 2000; Wright & Seymour, 2000). The purpose of this study is to describe the impact of parental incarceration on African-American young adults (18 years and older) who overcame their difficult situations and went on to graduate from high school. This study is guided by the primary questions: How do African-American young adults (18 years and older) describe the impact of parental incarceration on their lives, and how they were able to overcome the difficult situation and graduate from high school?

This chapter addresses research design and the data-collection strategy used in the case study. It shows how the data were managed through "descriptions, analysis, and interpretation" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 11) and it reports on the artifacts and methods used to show trustworthiness, generalizability, and ethical conduct during the process of discovery.

Research Design

The methodology utilized for this study was qualitative research. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research employs participants to construct meaning about "their world and the experiences they have in their world" (p. 6). Hence, qualitative research focuses on social phenomena of people and examines a specific problem that is poorly understood. Merriam (1998) also emphasizes another characteristic of qualitative research design; it "involves fieldwork" (p. 7). In this study, the fieldwork gave accurate descriptions of experiences in the social, cultural, and familial contexts (Myers, 2000).

Qualitative research has other characteristics such as the "natural world, multiple methods, context, systematic reflection, exquisite sensitivity to personal biography, emergent, and fundamentally interpretive" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, pp. 9-11). Thus, maybe the most important reason for conducting qualitative research, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), is the "desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge" (p. 16). This methodological approach assumes that researchers use their "sensory experience" to understand the social problem in the real world (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 8). The richness and depth of explorations and descriptions stand alone among the many distinctive features of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007).

As a "human instrument" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7), I responded to the world of African-American offspring in the context of the social phenomenon. In the transformation process, a series of steps was taken to make sense of their world. The open-ended interview questions allowed for a conversational flow. Great effort was

expended to collect and maintain a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003). Coherence was sought in the participant's narratives which allowed for the analysis of words, reporting of detail, reflective views of participants, and conduct of the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007).

This section exposed the nonconventional approach taken in this study to highlight the issues pertaining to the contemporary social problem. What follows is an in-depth look at how the study unfolded over time, using the perspectives of the 12 African-American offspring's experiences with the phenomenon.

Case Study Research

Case study research "aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest" (Bromley, 1990, p. 302). According to Zucker (2001), it is a nonconventional approach used to describe and emphasize the perspectives of the cases that serve as major informants in the study. As much as a case study has no standard definition or understanding, presenting it is a useful strategy for "raising questions, highlighting issues, developing and testing theory, and providing guidance in solving problems" (Cooper & Morgan, 2008, p. 161). In his 2003 book *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Robert Yin asserted that "the best preparation for conducting a case study analysis is to have a general analytic strategy (p. 115). Hence, the strategy should include an "all-encompassing method—covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis" (Yin, 2003, p. 14).

In social-science work, qualitative case study research design is one of the most challenging because the researcher must identify and select a single case or multiple

cases (Creswell, 1994). Generally, it demands much from the researcher as it relies on multiple sources of evidence derived from real-life events and people (Yin, 1984).

A multiple-case study was selected to unveil reflective stories and give a "holistic analysis" of issues within a single social problem (phenomenon), that is, of children left behind due to parental incarceration (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). According to Stake (1995), the researcher sets out to gather the greatest amount of information in the short time available for the study with the goal of learning from the cases.

For this study, it was assumed that parental incarceration impacted children and was a complex situational problem, particularly in African-American communities. The social phenomenon impacted society in general. These assumptions established the rationale for the undertaking and made the decision plausible. Emphasis was placed on the purpose of this study and on the process of investigating through literature review, which furnished support and helped justify decisions made throughout the research. A coherent approach was taken in order to understand the real-life experiences of the African-American offspring (18 years and older).

The strong human interest covered contextual conditions interpreted by each participant. It was crucial to capture accurately their subjective information through their reflective stories. Given all the variables inherent in being separated from a parent due to incarceration, the aim of the study was to discover those various influences that enabled the selected participants to survive the trauma and to learn how they became resilient and successful. The case study research gave the study its rich and deep exposure to the reality as understood by 12 young people.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is "human centered in that it captures and analyzes life stories. In doing this it has the ability to document critical life events in illuminating detail, and yet reveal holistic views and qualities that give stories valuable potential for research" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 13).

According to Webster and Mertova (2007), research benefits from increased knowledge of human experience due to narrative studies. Narratives can document an unfolding story with its "complexities of characters, relationships and settings" to illustrate problems (p. 13). Casting light on a problem offers "understanding often not revealed by traditional modes of inquiry" (p. 14).

In the 1990s, narrative came from two fields of inquiry: qualitative research and knowledge management, which was labeled a discipline at the time. It was supposed to be a method of "identifying, representing, sharing, and communicating knowledge" (Bruner, 1990, p. 85). Jerome Bruner shared his idea that the narrative form is "the desire to communicate meaning" in a particular time (p. 85). According to Polkinghorne (1988), the narrative is placed in time to "assume an experience of time rather than just reference historical time" (p. 132). Bruner's (1990) approach captured the essence of narrative by uniting the two concepts of memory and time.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommended that narrative inquiry use data sources such as "stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artifacts), and life experience" (p. 115). They emphasized that "collecting and analyzing stories is only part of narrative inquiry." In

mapping a "continuum of narrative inquiry," they showed the power of narrative "from the living to the telling and to the retelling of experience" (p. 189).

In their book *Narrative Inquiry* (2000), Clandinin and Connelly cited John Dewey's philosophical ideas (p. 2) because he saw personal and social experiences being critical to an individual's life story. Dewey defines "narrative inquiry in terms of the nature of experience" (p. 2). He believed that there was "continuity" (p. 2). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledged that "narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience" (p. 189). In other words, "participants are in relation, and we as researchers are in relation to participants" (p. 189). Hence, it is obvious that "relationship is key to what it is narrative inquirers do" (p. 189).

As they noted, "research is a collaborative document, a mutually constructed story out of the lives of both researcher and participant" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). The two researchers also admitted that narrative research inquiries were "always composed around a particular wonder" (p. 124). Thinking about the wonder or the problem in this study led to a focus on examining the framework that would allow the African-American offspring to travel "inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place" (p. 49).

These informants recounted their stories of a past filled with high risks and difficulties from the event of paternal incarceration. They shared how this one event set in motion experiences that affected them, psychologically, mentally, and socially. But they faced the challenges, conquered their fears, and accepted support from family and their community, successfully navigating as they learned how to become resilient. In short, narrative inquiry was the right tool to help understand the complexities of their past

problems. Narrative inquiry allowed the African-American participants to put the "data into their own words and reveal the latent *why* behind their assertions" (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002, p. 163). The field research unfolded the interpretive stories from the participants' views.

Myself as a Research Instrument

My past experiences working with at-risk, urban, culturally diverse children fueled my passion for this undertaking. I have always wanted to know more about these types of children in order to increase my own understanding of this population. Conducting a Children of Parental Incarceration Study invoked simultaneous feelings of anguish and excitement with in me, as I set out to follow a dream that I had set aside for so long, to raise my children. Upon reflection, I realized that the children of prisoners that had passed through my hands had left their prints on my heart and on my professional work. Because this topic is serious and complex, filled with many emotional peaks and valleys, I approached this research with cautious optimism.

I can attribute the shifting of my professional focus to the time when I became involved with the Beginning Awareness Basic Education Studies (BABES) Program in the early 1990s. Lucinda Florio, the wife of the former governor of New Jersey, asked the Martin Luther King Jr. Youth Center to use its afterschool program to launch BABES. It was a curriculum designed to reach high-risk children coming from drug-infested neighborhoods and homes through puppetry storytelling. The puppets would teach the children to learn positive life skills in a nonjudgmental way. It seemed simple enough. So, I became a trained BABES presenter. My job was to prepare the children for the media blitz ahead and what would come after the lights and tape recorders were put

away. Things appeared to go well on the day of the taping. However, when a few children caught me alone, they asked why the puppets failed to discuss prison or death.

Many of the Center's children were being raised in foster care or by relatives. They were separated from their parents and were in pain. I knew there was immense value in these untold stories. In fact, one child expressed anger that no one had asked him about his life. I recall one occasion where we settled in a quiet place so that I could listen to their stories, one young boy stretched out his hands and exclaimed, "Mrs. Ming, what is going to happen to me when my grandmother dies? She is all I have left." At that moment my feelings overwhelmed my academic interest.

I made a commitment that day to never forget children like him who are left alone because their parents have been taken away by authorities. That BABES Program facilitated the breaking of a silence by triggering the children to open up to me about the horrible events in their lives. They had never shared these experiences with anyone before in such a personal way.

As a leader, I took the challenge seriously to continue to make a difference in the lives of such children and their families. It is because of my previous experience that I faced this research with passion and this journey with confidence. The children of prisoners deserve to be studied because of their vast numbers and the fact that they have somehow been overlooked. I see beyond the value their stories will have to the scholarly community. I see what their stories will mean to other children left behind, especially since they need support from the teachers, the prison system, the police officers, the social workers, and the families. Our job is to rekindle their dreams and help them believe that they are tomorrow's future.

Data Collection

In this section, I described each step for information collection within the boundaries I imposed. The process entailed purposive sampling, semi-structured (or unstructured) interviews, and procedures. All of these steps resulted in the act of "recording information" from the interviews (Creswell, 2003, p. 185).

The Purposive Sampling Process

The strategy for this research was to find 12 African-American young adults through various methods, and focus on their experiences and perceptions about their lives as children of incarcerated parents. Purposeful sampling is powerful because each case has the potential to be rich in information and extensive for study (Patton, 1990). According to Creswell (2003), this is the best process "to provide help for the researcher in understanding the problem and the research question" (p. 185). This method provided a way for selected individuals to purposefully inform because of what they knew. The characteristic of qualitative research with a multiple-case study is designed to show generalizability; "the simple presentation of individual cases . . . to arrive at broad generalizations based on case study evidence." This research strategy investigates a specific topic by "following a set of prespecified procedures" (Yin, 2003, p. 15; see also Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006).

A purposeful sampling was achieved and 12 African-American young adults (18 years old or older) 5 males and 7 females agreed to participate in this study. The criteria for participation required that each interviewee (a) had to have at least one incarcerated parent while he/she was a child; (b) had to have demonstrated resiliency by

avoiding criminal patterns and graduating from high school; and (c) was willing and able to tell his/her story.

My participants' pool came from targeted geographical areas of Maryland, New Jersey, and New York. Once the sampling goal was met, the study proceeded as outlined in Appendices G and H. Their responses to the email survey would help me to understand what was important to them and whether they would be knowledgeable, reflective, and have a point of view concerning the reasons for their success.

My fieldwork began with the search for as many referrals as possible in order to find 12 young people who were right for this study. The first batch of letters went out by traditional mail. They were sent to several organizational leaders of diverse professional backgrounds who were involved with at-risk youth (e.g., Recruiter and Trainer, Leadership Training Institute of New York; Executive Director, U.S. Dream Academy, Columbia, MD; and Senior Consultants for After-School Corporations and Foundations in Maryland and New York). My letter request detailed the purpose for the study, as well as a request form soliciting potential participants who fit the criteria reflected in Appendices A and B. Many (participants or sources) were contacted by telephone before and after the mailing for follow-up. After a proper length of time, with only two responses in-hand, I sent second requests and another batch of letters and email requests. I heard back from three people, and I was given some names. But it became obvious that contacting people through letters and email was a dead end.

I shifted the focus from waiting for responses to being proactive by prospecting in the field and introducing the study personally. The face-to face meetings took place in the same geographic areas: New York, New Jersey, and Maryland. After many weeks of

visiting colleges, universities, bookstores, and supermarkets, and having left fliers at every location, one college-age young man called me and another walked into the Office of Student Life on her campus and asked to become part of the study. Both were potentially good candidates but failed to follow through, so this method, too, became another dead end. However, I saw promise.

"How do I get young people to talk?" was my concern. A former colleague of On-Site Child Care Centers, Newark, NJ, became a valuable source. She responded to my email request and sent me three potential candidates with all their contact information. She had gotten their permission for me to speak with them. I phoned each one, introduced myself, allowed them time to question me, and then asked them some qualifying questions, and suggested a face-to-face-meeting for the purpose of them seeing me and getting comfortable with me. I needed to build trust with them. I discovered in the field how sensitive this subject is, so I felt that the meeting would be advantageous for all. It turned out that I was right; they became my first participants in New Jersey.

When my first interview was over, that interviewee gave me the name of another person to contact. It turned out that this became the norm. In the meantime, through my professional collaboration with personnel at After-School organizations, I was given contact information for other potential participants in Maryland. From that group, I selected two candidates. I continued canvassing the field and was successful. I followed the leads by always making a telephone call to the young person, and then sending a confirming communication via email, or in a few instances I had to arrange for a special delivery of the necessary enrollment paperwork. These efforts continued until I had lined up 12 viable candidates. I refused no one.

One colleague kept passing on names of potential candidates. I followed up immediately after I was given contact information. These young people came from New Jersey and Long Island, NY, and many became willing participants. Through the referral of the U.S. Dream Academy, I made contact with Angel Tree's Prison Fellowship Program. Eleven church coordinators in the field were contacted, and from them, I received the names and contact information of five viable candidates. However, they responded a few months too late.

In the end, I had more participants than I needed. The selected 12 participants received all appropriate correspondence referenced in Appendices D and E. The dates for semi-structured interviews were set, and the natural settings, public libraries, bookstores, and a local church had been selected by me for the convenience of the participants. Every location was familiar to them and was within their communities.

The Interview Procedure Process

This study is a naturalistic inquiry. The following forms were used for data collection from various sources and methods to complete the task of learning more.

The Pre-Interview

The use of electronic mail was often seen by researchers as "an efficient and effective method" to conduct a survey to obtain information from participants of the study (Princeton Survey Research, 2007, p. 1). I used email as a secondary means before collecting data for the main study. I was able to gain helpful knowledge, communicate with potential participants, reinforce confidentiality, and identify any issues that needed

to be addressed for clarity. The pre-interview survey (Appendix E) was a separate document used to produce characteristic information about the informants.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Kvale (1996) referred to qualitative interviewing as a "construction site of knowledge" (p. 42). The semi-structured interviews of qualitative research allowed flexibility in the interview process and provided greater insight into the problem under investigation. The openness allowed the participants to provide reflective stories that "project their own ways of defining their world," and as such, the methodological objectives of the study were met (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, pp. 146-147; Smith, 1995, p. 3).

Seidman (2006) suggested that "telling stories [is] essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (p. 7). I looked for the participants to deliver a beginning, middle, and end.

Irving Seidman (2006) concluded that for interviewing to be in-depth and meaningful, the researcher must be interested in others and understand that their stories are important and "of worth" (p. 9). In his book, Seidman claimed that there are limits to our understanding of others' experiences, but we must put forth effort to "comprehend people by understanding their actions" (p. 9). According to Kvale (1996), these are the aspects that will lead the researcher to understand the central themes the participants experienced because qualitative narrative research's orientation is organizing human knowledge, and the processes never change.

My “icebreaker questions” were (a) How are the lives of resilient African-American young adults impacted by the incarceration of one or both parents? (b) How do African-American young adults survive the early years after the initial incarceration of one or both parents? (c) What strategies do they use to live a crime-free and jail-free life? and (d) What strategies did they use to successfully complete high school? Since this is a case-study research strategy involving African-American offspring impacted in childhood by parental incarceration, it is through the lens of the participants that a new body of knowledge provided me with the opportunity to expand sociological insights into a life without a biological parent or parents.

The Interview

Interviewing is both a research strategy and a social relationship that must be cherished and maintained throughout the process. I explored lived experiences of the 12 African-American offspring.

Each participant signed a written consent form prior to the commencement of this interview, and I made a contact visit, if necessary, to provide assurance. Each individual was an informed, willing participant. The interview process was logical and clear (Wengraf, 2001), therefore, the procedure unfolded without incident. I worked directly with each participant. I collected information from their answers to the same general areas of questions. This approach allowed for the participants to engage fully in the process and gave them the freedom to prioritize their responses. This set up a favorable atmosphere for me to obtain the needed information. As the in-depth interviews proceeded, the participants gave rich details from memory. Each participant recounted the impact of parental incarceration on his /her childhood.

I sat with each participant face-to-face for 60 to 90 minutes and conducted interviews. Since the interviews were "unstructured, my task was to build upon and explore the participants' responses" to the questions posed (Seidman, 2006, p. 15). A tape recorder captured the words spoken in the in-depth interviews. I verified periodically that the tape recorder was working. The recording enabled me to later check the transcription for accuracy. Throughout the process, I remained neutral, encouraged responses, and provided transitions between topics. I never lost control of any of the 12 interview sessions.

To recap, before the interview procedure began, I introduced each individual to the general purpose and the main topic, followed by sample questions. The open-ended prompts relied on the participants' responses being information-rich, and addressed the "intellectual and emotional connections" of their past and present lives (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). When the participant gave no more new information (i.e., the data-saturation point), I ended the interview session.

Artifacts

Artifact usage is an approach that allows for the inclusion of any relevant physical evidence. In the reflective stories, artifacts can become important in understanding the overall case of an individual. Yin (2003) emphasizes that a major strength of case study is that evidence can be obtained from many different sources.

In this study, written artifacts helped the individual participants to recall personal and family facts. I encouraged participants to bring items to the interviews if, by so doing, their memories could be jogged. This approach provided me with a rich source of information to tap into, and it proved to be helpful in unlocking painful memories. Some

participants brought poetry and letters, and these triggered recollections and brought depth to their reflections.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research work requires much from the researcher. It becomes clear just how demanding the task is when the data analysis phase begins. At this critical time, the researcher must become a collaborator, allowing the words and meanings of the participants to flow effectively and make sense. Ruona (2005) emphasized the personal involvement and strongly recommended that "our lenses stay as clear as possible so we can retain our focus on the voices of the participants" (p. 235). Along the same lines, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) wrote that "data analysis is the process of organizing and sorting data in light of increasingly sophisticated judgments and interpretations" (p. 130). In the same way, Yin (2003) argued on behalf of the case study, but admitted that "the analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies" (p. 109).

Data analysis began when I took the verbatim data, organized it, and reduced it. This was the classification phase. I undertook a search for themes and patterns in the stories. My aim was to identify the "perception codes," and I did this by accurately recording the participants' perceptions of and understanding about their childhood experiences during the long period of parental incarceration (Wiersma, 1995, p. 217). The coding emerged as the "iterative data analysis" and the interpretative process unfolded (Wiersma, 1995, p. 217). I used an inductive analytic strategy. I was aware of Merriam and Associates (2002), who stressed the value in the coding as they drew attention to the organizational advantages for themes. Moreover, I reread all the interviews and

transcripts. I undertook the marking of passages in order to group the participants into categories for thematic connections (Seidman, 2006).

To manage the process of analyzing data, I compared constantly, self-repeated, and contrasted and categorized the passages because they came from communications that emphasized textual interpretation (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Over a decade ago, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) stated that the direct process path for text analytics is to allow concepts from the data to emerge. So I carefully managed the process, constantly applying inductive and deductive thinking. I recoded the data as new categories emerged. I looked for categories and their relationships and gave them analytical consideration. Then, I reviewed the coded data to eliminate redundancy.

Having assigned the themes of all of the transcribed interviews to coded data, I then placed them in piles with related codes. I labeled the piles with a word or phrase. Then I reviewed the piles several times and looked for answers to the following questions: (a) Can any piles be combined? (b) Can a pile be deleted because it didn't did not fit or relate to the research question? and (c) Does the selected information have a solid relationship to the word or phrase assigned at the top of the pile? Finally, I permitted connection and interpretation of the themes. By performing this action, I tied every piece of allowable data together and I found an answer to the research questions because the themes and patterns made sense and I had a "comprehensive, descriptively rich narrative" (Wiersma, 1995, p. 219). According to Creswell (2007), the data were "couched in terms of personal views" (p. 244).

Following the analysis of the individual cases, I conducted a cross-case analysis, comparing and contrasting the themes. The significance of cross-case analysis is

"grouping together answers from different people to common questions, or analyzing different perspectives on central issues" (Patton, 2002, p. 440). Yin (2003) insists that the goal or initial objective of a multiple-case study is to abstract an explanation that is general but fits "each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in the details" (p. 121). In this study, a multiple-case inquiry allowed for the cross-case analysis to take place and increased the validity of findings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Initially, the focus on understanding the individual cases came before those unique cases were combined. I grouped together a series of related subsections or themes: family/social challenges, primary-care provider, school life, learning to cope, resilience, and successes. But, as I sought a deeper understanding of how African-American young adults describe the impact of parental incarceration on their lives, and how they were able to overcome the difficult situation and graduate from high school, I recognized a slight shift in focus as I concluded the cross-case analysis procedure. Some of the themes and categories had to be changed to give a clearer picture of the 12 combined cases. For example, the primary-caregiver subsection was combined with the family section and the school section merged under the community supports; in addition, I added a new church category because the analysis showed that all the case subjects had been strongly supported by this institution through its members. Spirituality was significant. Looking even closer, I saw the new themes emerge to be the family, the community, and the individual strengths of each participant. In the end, cross-case analysis elaborated on the evidence of those new emergent categories and patterns that were embedded in specific cases from the combined analysis.

Trustworthiness

Every researcher wants a study of this nature to be trustworthy. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) suggested that it "must demonstrate its truth value, provide a basis for applying it, and allow for external judgments to be about the consistency of its procedures and the neutrality of its findings or decisions" (p. 29).

According to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) argument,, "the inquiry's findings are worth paying attention to" and the appropriate qualities of truth are embedded in "trustworthiness" (p. 290). Merriam and Associates (2002) emphasized that the interpretations of reality come directly from the human instrument in qualitative study through observations and interviews. Direct contact with the participants was important. The interviews allowed me the opportunity to observe them. The taped responses enabled me to capture and process such aspects of their responses, as conversational pauses, emotional occurrences (i.e., crying), facial gestures (i.e., stoic expressions), and body language (i.e., hand gestures). This information combined with their words assisted me in identifying and interpreting themes and patterns.

Merriam (1998) suggests several basic strategies "to enhance the validity of qualitative research" (p. 204). To ensure truth value in this holistic inquiry, I looked at the following processes or techniques as validity checks: triangulation, thick description, member check, and peer evaluation.

Triangulation was a check for "the process of using multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts or theories" in order to validate the findings (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 574). Through my lens as the researcher, I utilized the holistic approach, triangulating data by using their multiple data through the interviews. The rich

descriptions of the 12 participants' reality gave insight about similar events, relationships, and interactions that occurred in the context of home, church, and school. This process established support for their information.

To strengthen the power of the stories, I also utilized structural corroboration. According to Eisner (1998), "like the process of triangulation, structural corroboration is a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs" (p. 110). I took my data from interviews with the 12 participants, and from the analysis of the qualitative information related to the interpretation, I searched for "recurrent behavior or actions, those theme-like features of a situation that inspire confidence that the events interpreted and appraised are not aberrant or exceptional, but rather characteristic of the situation" (p. 110). In my study, I used this technique to see how the findings that emerged had similarities and differences. For example, the young people painted pictures of their survival with a strong church linkage, but there were differences in how they connected with members.

Thick description was another strategy I used to increase the trustworthiness of my study. It carried weight in the sense that it helped me to see that the results are believable. I was convinced that enough similarities were present from the questions to evoke their stories in a rich descriptive manner. Since Merriam (1998) states that "thick description means the complete literal description of the incident being investigated" (p. 43), the participants were engaged by the questions and were willing to open themselves in the study and reflect deeply in their answers to bring out the best experiences of their past in the context of this contemporary social problem.

Member checking required the interviewees to verify the transcriptions and/or stories. The strategy allowed the interviewees to "identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem and issue being pursued" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). After the process of coding, interpreting, and analyzing, I consulted participants on pertinent details of their stories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This validity check is collaborative and allowed the participants to be directly involved. To ensure truth value, I turned to them if I had any questions about their original data. I received clarification over the telephone and in person. By following a flexible path, I was able to extract additional information from the participants. My observations gave the interviewees another opportunity to revisit the original data to make sure that I had conceptually and accurately interpreted them. This approach led to the research findings being "credible" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296).

Peer evaluation was another strategy used for establishing trustworthiness. I drew on my Servant Leader Regional Group Members (peer examination) to read the cases, the data analysis, and the results. According to Merriam (1998), the "chain of evidence" must be reviewed for honesty in the telling (p. 204). I expected comments on whether or not I had interpreted the data accurately to give the fullest picture of the 12 participants' stories. Did I capture the participants' reality? The members gave interesting critiques that forced me to revisit and review the data. These readers were significant to the study because they examined the methodological processes. The literature of Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirms that being open to others reading our work in progress can make the research better. The key for the success of this qualitative case study was to be able to ask the following question from Eisner (1998): "Does the story make sense?" (p. 53). Eisner

had previously stated that qualitative studies can be judged for success when "qualitative research becomes believable because of its coherence, insight and instrument utility" (p. 39).

Generalizability

Generalization is a major product of inquiry in qualitative research, and it is what the researcher learns. The learning can be of data in the form of skills, images, and ideas. There are many opportunities for generalization to predict or allow expectations for the future (Eisner, 1998). In fact, generalizability allows the reader to take new knowledge and transfer it. After all, Eisner (1998) insisted, "generalizing can be regarded as going beyond the information given and transferring what has been learned from one situation or task to another" (pp. 198-199).

One of the characteristics of qualitative studies is writing vividly, and this feature makes it strong. This study aimed to create images of 12 lives in the mind of the reader. Some situations differed, presenting the reader an opportunity to generalize about other features of their lives. According to Eisner (1998), "One of the most useful human abilities, is the ability to learn from the experience of others" (p. 202). Kvale (1996) gave his insight: "Naturalistic generalization rests on personal experience. It develops for the person as a function of experience—a humanistic view implies that every situation is unique, having its own intrinsic structure and logic" (p. 232).

However, part of the generalization process in qualitative studies is the "knowing" and "understanding." The researcher makes a selection of which perspective is valid and for what purpose it can be used. In qualitative studies, it lies within the power of the reader to determine whether the research findings fit the situation. In the case of this

study, the reader (or researcher) must determine the impact of parental incarceration on resilient African-American adults. To summarize, (???) the extent of the usage of what one expects in a qualitative case study determines the validity of generalization (Eisner, 1998).

Ethics

Informants shared private, personal information that might benefit society. In light of investigating a sensitive subject, I strongly considered measures to protect the participants who entrusted their stories with me. The methods I used were "ethically justifiable" (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 64). I followed the ethical guidelines for social research, and I exhibited moral fortitude and integrity throughout the process.

Furthermore, I handled all data appropriately and kept the informants' identities well protected by means of secure data storage. I removed the identifiers and used pseudonyms. I briefed the informants in detail, in simple language, about what the informed consent meant to them. I followed Bloor and Wood's (2006, p. 68) suggested course of action and explained carefully the nature of the research: What was required of them in consenting to participate? Who was undertaking this research? How was the research going to be disseminated and used?

In this study, I strictly adhered to any protocol mandated by the Institutional Review Board. All documents that I prepared met the ethical standards of Andrews University. There were no ethical issues of consequence to cause me concern. This inquiry sought to bring no harm to them. However, for the participants' protection in the case of any of them having a negative reaction or experiencing some level of stress from recalling memories from their childhood trauma of having one or both parents

incarcerated, I arranged for social workers and psychologists to offer intervention services as a means to minimize any social or psychological risks or discomforts.

Throughout the study, I was extremely sensitive to the needs and unique circumstances of the participants. I respected the participants throughout the duration of the study. I also respected their right to withdraw at any time. Moreover, I never applied any means of coercion.

Summary

In summary, this chapter covered the methodology I used in this study. It started with two questions and those questions shaped the activities in this field. This chapter unfolded the details of what I hoped to accomplish. The chapter highlighted the research design and moved through every marker of good qualitative research that would result in better understanding and learning. The collection of the data provided meaningful blocks of information gathered from my direct contact with each participant. Finally, the chapter ended with the description of a product that hopefully will contribute to improving practices, and most of all, will lead to concrete support for individuals who experience acute stresses daily because a parent is incarcerated.

CHAPTER IV

GIVING VOICE TO THE UNSPOKEN

Introduction

The solution of adult problems tomorrow depends in large measure upon the way our children grow up today. There is no greater insight into the future than recognizing when we save our children, we save ourselves.—Margaret Mead

This chapter is dedicated to 12 African-American young adults who have offered their voices to tell their personal stories as they understood them about how parental incarceration interfered with their development during their childhood years. Their opinions or impressions were explored through the telling, revealing subtle nuances as they described their ups and downs from the impact of imprisonment. Confidentiality had afforded them a sense of ease and gave them the confidence to allow the process to unfold naturally from the beginning.

The design of this study was constructed with their needs in mind. In general, the topics covered a wide spectrum of their experiences. However, the data analysis process allowed for narrowing the focus of the emerging themes in order to give the clearest picture of the impact of criminality. This was done by offering aspects of their story that indicate such strong content that it could not be ignored or by simply allowing the flow of the narrative of a life lived in the shadow of prison bars. There was such candor in the interviews that recording them became a humbling task. The topics evolved and so

presented here are (a) navigating family/social challenges, and conveying details about (b) their primary-care provider, (c) school life, (d) coping mechanisms, and (e) resilience and successes. As much as the conversations with the African-American young people revealed struggles and hardships, the study's aim was to explore their strengths and insights.

The Reality of Their World

A hand goes up and three fingers are shockingly missing, and a young woman's smile lights up the room as she exclaims, "A firecracker accident during my childhood!" I am taken aback by the sight, but she insists that her condition is not nearly as life-altering as her childhood experiences have been. The same young woman waits to throw me off again, just a little bit, and when that moment comes, she keeps her eyes on my face as she states, "My boyfriend is a felon." Her life experiences have prepared her for tough choices; this is one. She feels strongly about redemption and believes that it comes to those who commit to restoring their lives. Her young man has done just that, and as he works, he dreams of going to college. She has given him the gift of trust and the security of a second chance. His actions have told her that one cannot just stereotypically write off people who go to jail. She has faith that he will be different from her dad. She is an advocate for second chances. The reality is that there are 11 more tales of different life experiences of resilient African-American young people who are determined to not let the stench of incarceration derail their future.

Each of the young African-American people in this study possesses a healthy degree of independence and optimism. The power of the field study is evident in their very personal stories, sometimes delivered very animatedly. Their lives are extraordinary.

No two individuals have had the exact experience with prison, but they are connected profoundly by the common threads of depravity, poverty, secrecy, fear, and loneliness — all of which seem to have short-circuited their innocence and hid from them the carefree world of childhood.

These young people rose out of the ashes of hardship and pain caused by parental imprisonment, and they walked away with an assortment of self-preservation strategies that define them. They refuse to settle for the life handed them during childhood. Although their darkest hours are reminders of their helplessness as children, they draw strength from their hopes and dreams recollected with critical reflection on how far they have come from and where they are capable of going if they work hard and remain steadfast in achieving success. They set their jaws stubbornly to indicate determination to be known as achievers, not criminals like their parents.

Doing justice to their stories is mandatory. From these circumstances come these soaring eagles whose voices speak in tones of humility; their magnificent stories are simply told and infused by great faith to do great work. The goal of this study is to tear down the invisible walls of these African-American young adults and allow their complex personalities to be seen, being unsparingly honest, showing no reluctance to expose the ugliness therein. The stories that follow are the result of the experiences told in narrative form by young people who have survived parental incarceration and, as a result of their adversity, have become thriving young adults.

This segment of the study now moves to the specific stories of the 12 African-American offspring (ages 18 and older) below. It follows their paths as they expose their real-life experiences.

David: Image of My Father

Introduction

David has two parents in prison, so he has been cared for by his maternal grandmother since infancy. He is 18 and the eldest of three children. All children reside with this grandmother. David is a graduate of high school. While he waits to enter college this fall, he works in the food-dietary department at a local hospital. In introducing his story in the pre-interview phase, David described why he never exhibited criminal behavior: "I always said I was going to be a better father and person than my own father was. I think there is more to life than causing trouble."

As David unfolds his story in the semi-structured interview, he sheds light on how he feels about various aspects of his childhood years that had the potential to derail his normal development. He uses a quiet demeanor to speak candidly about those troubling times and what it took to rise from despair to victory. Here is David's story.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

David's passage from childhood to adulthood was not smooth. Actually, he has lived a conflicted life, filled with unpredicted events, none of which was controlled by him. For example, his father and mother were never married. His father went to prison by his second birthday, and his mother lived on the streets. His heritage makes him pause because both of his parents are criminals and they are living apart from him due to imprisonment. For 18 years he has been without nurture and love from his parents.

His shoulders seem to be weighted down with the painful knowledge that his facial features mirror his father's, and this reminder infuses him with anxiety. Hearing talk from others about his father in those early years left him confused about his father's

prison situation. On the one hand, he hates the thought of being his father's son, and on the other, he reflects on the years he has wasted, yearning for a relationship that never will be. He feels conflicted daily. David shared some thoughts about his father:

> Um, yeah, I was kind of confused about the whole situation because I heard so many things about who my father was, and that I looked liked my father, I look a little bit, but I never like, got . . . I never even got to see what he looked like, I didn't know the reason he was locked up, I just knew that he was locked up. And I always wondered why, like, well, why didn't he try to get in contact with me? Or why won't nobody tell me why he locked up and stuff like that.

David spent much time wondering about the man most people called his father. They repeatedly stated that he looked like him. In David's sixth or seventh year, he was told by many people—cousins, grandmother, and aunts—that his father was in prison. This news did not remove the confusion about his self-identity; it just compounded it. The family members produced no clear answers to the many questions he had held in his head for as long as he could remember. This made him feel awkward about the whole situation. During this period, he spent a lot of time silently wondering to himself about his family troubles. And he concluded that there were better things out there for him to do. He also concluded that some people would judge him based on his family pedigree.

During his youth, David would fantasize about why his parents didn't get in touch with him. He actually believed that someone was preventing them from reaching out to him. His was sad. He thought about all the things happening around him, and this fueled anger and rage within him. He had no one. He was lonely. He wished to share his pent-up feelings, but with whom? There were those who thought that he just had a bad temper; life was unusually harsh for him at that time. David was frustrated because he could not explain his behaviors adequately to his critics. At 8 years old, he was wrestling with rejection from the father he didn't know but longed for all his life. He was hurt and filled

with anguish when told that his father said that he was not his son. He felt that he didn't have a father to really love him. His father had insisted that his mother abort him, even though he believed that David was not his child. David accepted the news and the limited facts in silence, endured the discomfort, and moved forward eventually. To his delight, he had a better childhood than he expected through the years.

The reality of David's childhood is that he had parents behind bars. His father made nothing of himself. He never attended college. David missed and yearned for parental counsel. Moreover, he knew that he would never have the comfort of knowing that he could seek it out from either his father or mother. He had no parent to praise him, especially a mother. With pain in his voice, he declared that it was futile to keep longing to hear his mother say to him that she was proud of him or that she loved him. He also recognized that he had a nonexistent relationship with his father. As he reflected over his orphan status, he remembered strong emotions that had radiated from him, such as confusion, pain, sadness, heartache, and anger. By contrast, he had his grandmother.

Primary-Care Provider

This young man was saved by his grandmother. He was an infant when she claimed him and became his sole parent. He relished the home life that his grandmother struggled to give him in her limited fashion. She did the best that she could with her meager resources, and above all, he knew that she was committed to him by her actions, reflected in everything she did. He was grateful. She was a constant in his life, always supportive, whether at home or at school. She took on unimaginable responsibilities, parenting for a second time, for a second generation, and he never felt like a burden. David said it best:

> Home life-style with my grandmother was all I needed. She did the best she could for me. She couldn't provide everything for me, she wanted to, but I knew she was doing her best. My grandmother was all I had at the time. She was always there for me, at school or outside of school. She supported me in anything I wanted to do. My grandmother loves me.

David never had to earn his grandmother's love. She showered her affections upon him freely. If anything or anyone troubled him during his formative years, she would find a way to make it right and then say, "Grandma knows best." David's grandmother has impacted his life in such a positive way that it was easy for him to paint the following picture of their life together:

> Without her, I don't know where I would be today. My grandmother, she did so many things for me, taught me so many things, whether it was good or bad, that I had done, she always loved me regardless, and she always knew that I could always do better. She never doubted me, or told me anything wrong . . . my grandmother, she done things that I know she didn't have to do . . . but she did it anyway because I know she loves me. And I appreciate everything that she did for me, because without her, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

However, David admitted that sometimes when he was a child, he felt lonely and emotionally injured because his parents weren't in his life and he simply felt the sting of deep pain. But Grandmother gave him the confidence that he needed to overcome those melancholy feelings because the reality was, according to David, "I only had a grandmother that was my parent." Actually, David had to admit:

> Some things I didn't even know how to do. I was never taught by my grandmother because she's my grandmother. Some things your father will teach you or your mother would teach you. My grandma didn't always have the time or she never really knew much about it herself.

Yet, David will continue to praise his grandmother who never gave up on him. She gave him the best of herself as she guided him through barriers in his life. In spite of his grandmother's limited knowledge about what a boy needed to know in his social

world, and her limited time, she exposed him to other adults who could help and instill confidence in him, too.

School Life

There were moments in his young life when he felt helpless in spite of having his grandmother's support. Elementary- and middle school years were difficult for him. During these years, his dysfunction had a lot to do with inner feelings about his parental circumstance and his strong desire to lead a normal life like other children in his school. He yearned to be flanked by his father or mother at special events at his school, such as the father-son breakfasts or the PTA meetings, where he saw other children with their parents, but sadly, he was always alone. He missed out on so much that other children took for granted because his parents were absent. He had no one to take to these events whom he could call his parent.

He considered this middle-school period to be his worst. Yet, he saw a silver lining. Every aspect of his life was not bad because peers and teachers were somewhat supportive. However, he didn't feel connected at that time. Life was pushing him along, and he realized that some life lessons that a boy should learn from home and that would serve him well at school, he would never receive. His wonderful grandmother just didn't know what he really needed. David felt adamantly that his parents let him down by their criminal lifestyle. He needed their nurturing, and so he blamed them for anything he lacked in his development. He had to learn a lot of things on his own. For instance, he learned how to play sports on his own and to compete. He considers these years his antisocial years because he was drawn to children like himself with the same predicament: having a parent in prison. They clustered together and shared. They gave

one another what they needed. Eventually, David received some needed attention from his elementary-school administrator, who reached out and became a positive force in his life, along with many others.

David found high-school years better for him emotionally. The positive things that began to happen in this new environment were an indication to him that he was moving toward wholeness. He started to learn and appreciate his own abilities. He rejected trouble of any sort and embraced learning and started thinking seriously about his future. He refocused and directed his attention to that future.

This entailed his musing over academic and parenting goals that were important to him. His mind accepted the academic challenges and rejected any thoughts related to him being a bad parent. He would be a better father to his children than his father was to him. He felt a burning desire to rise above his daunting situation and make wiser, smarter decisions from which his children could benefit. He imagined how fulfilled and pleased he would be if his children looked up to him. He would make sure that he made something out of his life. He set his eyes on college and was determined that no one would ever convince him that he couldn't achieve.

David was influenced by many people, and he gratefully acknowledged his wonderful high-school years because they have brought him great satisfaction. It was in that environment he matured and understood the power of love by feeling the support from his school family. Everyone knew one another. He felt safe because he was close to so many people. Walking in the halls of school was nourishing for him because of the constant encouragement he would receive from his principal, who seized the opportunity when David entered and exited classrooms to positively motivate him. Each time the

principal saw David in the halls, he would shout the school's motto, "Failure is not an option; It can be done!" as his way to encourage and inspire David to succeed. David found himself striving furiously to new heights of success. He was rewarded for his effort with good grades and a place on the honor rolls. He seemed to have a talent for science, so he buckled down and applied himself and won science competitions. He also continued to play sports. He considered himself well-rounded.

Learning to Cope

One particular incident in his life reminds him of how far he truly has come from those scared-little-boy years to his current life in which he is now adapting, drawing on his resilience, and taking control over his destiny. At age 13, David visited his father. Still conflicted by the lack of answers surrounding his parentage, he wanted to put his questions to his father in person. He walked into the unwelcoming environment of prison with mixed emotions. He sat in a chair and waited for the father he longed to know. While waiting for his father to enter, David pondered the fact that he had no idea what to expect. He considered what he wanted from the visit, but he wasn't sure if he would see love or, in fact, any treatment that indicated that his father was willing to accept him as his son or even talk to him a "lot or a little."

Although David's father never answered any of David's questions, he did, on that first visit, acknowledge him as his son. His father couldn't avoid this truth because the boy who stood before him looked exactly like him. Regardless of the lack of candor, David returned to visit his father several more times and had conversations with him, but he never gained the one thing he wanted most of all: a close relationship. Today, his father remains a stranger but David still hopes. The parental incarceration issues remain

but are diminished by David's personal growth and his choice to take the route that successful supporters travel.

Resilience and Successes

David would be the first to tell you that his childhood experiences were complex but that he managed to cope and adapt, and find himself in the resilience process—and he liked what he saw in the mirror. He didn't take only one path to find his success in his life journey; he ventured forth on multiple pathways, and each turn in the road strengthened his resolve to be the best he could be. The trials and tribulations made him more determined to make it and helped to define him; he learned that he is not weak. David steadfastly acclaimed his grandmother as the ultimate hero because she, above all, used love to anchor him and words to soothe and comfort.

Today, he feels that he has matured into a wonderful human being. He is confident, and he believes that no matter what he does, he will succeed. He believes that as he ages, he will be successful in any endeavor. He gives honor to those who took the time to see him and care about him, and he pays tribute to them but recognizes that his resilience started with himself. Their molding helped him immensely, but he was the greatest influencer of his destiny. When he considers how he measures his success, he quickly asserts that once effort is put forth, one can always be successful in anything, even though one will experience wins and losses.

He repeats one theme over and over as if it is his personal motto. He insists that "one should never let anybody tell you what you cannot do." David believes that the effort behind the works is so important. He has a burning need not to let down the people who invested in him. They are imprinted on his mind because he sees them as

instruments of his success. He also includes other motivating factors such as grades and self-confidence that were assets to him throughout high school. He continues on his journey, following his dreams, becoming that person he knows that he can be. He is committed to making his family proud and to reaching his professional goal of becoming a doctor.

Along the way, he acknowledged that he finally learned some lessons that added to his strong sense of self:

> God is always by your side, God doesn't put too much on you that you cannot bear; trials and tribulations are neither excuses nor reasons for him [David's father] to go out and want to hurt and do bad things.

Trials and tribulations also could be considered motivators to do better. For instance, David demonstrated his evolution by simply stating, "I love me," and then explained how he sees resilience as a process in life. The challenge that he overcame was the ugliness of his life, putting an end to excuses that would have stunted his normal growth and finding the path to accomplish what was needed for him to flourish.

His heart aches constantly and his mind seems never at rest as he recognizes that he is only one generation away from criminality. Yet, he is determined that trouble will stop with him. He is hopeful about his dreams and considers it a miracle that he has weathered the storms of his childhood and is definitely a resilient survivor.

Indeed, David's story doesn't end here; this is only the beginning. He has many years before him to show the world that children of prisoners can and do make it. He leaves the interview with advice for others: Never doubt. He warns the professionals that they should never think badly of this population. They need to be there for the innocent and listen to their voices. He leaves a clear picture of his experiences, his ups and downs,

but most of all he leaves the secret of his resilience: his eternal love for his family. They are most important to him. He draws strength and overcomes the rough patches of life because of them. He is truly a jewel-in-the-rough and an inspiration.

Joyce: Advocator for Second Chances

Introduction

Joyce is 18 years old. She is a graduate of high school and has some college education. Her family is made up of her mother and three siblings. Joyce remains at home and works as a parking attendant. She was around 10 when her childhood was interrupted by the news that her father had become one of the inmates of the justice system. Although her parents were married, her father didn't live with them prior to his arrest and imprisonment. Joyce was thrust into unfamiliar territory and, as a young adult, still can vividly remember the challenges arising from having a parent in prison. Her father has been in and out of prison multiple times, and at the time of the interview process, he was once again behind bars.

Joyce explains in her pre-interview that her reason for not exhibiting criminal behavior has a lot to do with the desire not to fail her mother and a fear of stigma because of her criminal family. Her brother and sister are felons like her father. She had no control over their behavior but wishes that they had considered "the thought of someone else's life beside their own; thinking of what might happen if I'm not there."

Joyce's life serves as a beacon of despair and hope. Her thoughts are pertinent to revealing the different consequences felt by a child of parental incarceration. Joyce grew up in the New York area. Her geographical location places Joyce in a hamlet confronted

with the problem of too many African-American incarcerated parents. Out of that small town comes Joyce.

Joyce's words from the very beginning showed the power of attachment to a parent. It is evident as she showed such mixed emotions in describing her relationship with her dad in her youth. He had an aggressive personality that caused her to fear him at times, and when he was locked up, she felt great happiness. But, quickly, she indicated that his imprisonment didn't matter, and in the same breath she showed disappointment by revealing the thought that he "copped out," just a little bit. Her longing for him was disguised in the wish for him to behave so he could have been there for her. Sadly, he reneged on his commitments and she behaved like the child that she was; sometimes she accepted his calls from prison, and sometimes she would refuse to speak to him.

Currently, she is unaffected by a rumor in her neighborhood that her sick father is going to be released to a nursing home. The issue for her remains the stench of incarceration and the compounding factors overshadowing her young life. The study gives her a platform and the time to pause to remember her childhood circumstance.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

Joyce conveyed a chaotic childhood due to the character of her father and the lifestyle he chose that dragged his family down. He was a criminal and brought real tension within the family unit. As she explains, each day was a challenge to her nerves because she feared him showing up at the family home and causing trouble. She lived in fear once it was confirmed that he was out of prison. The sinking thought of him showing up made her so nervous. Yet she confessed that a part of her was guilty of hoping to see him because he was her dad. However, most of the time, she remained on edge.

There were times when her mom would take him back and allow him to live in their small home with too few rooms. Joyce admitted to sharing a room with her parents when she was a little girl. During this time, the danger of being in his presence was enormous because he sold drugs. From time to time, Joyce recounted that her mom would throw him out because of the drugs and the potential harm to her children. But, Joyce confessed, her mom would take him back and the household would be at his mercy once again. As long as her dad remained, Joyce lived an abnormal life.

Throughout her childhood, Joyce faced difficult challenges that disturbed her. She framed the erosion of her security during childhood in this way:

> One time that's when he was in and out of jail again and I was young, I was about 5 and my Mom had decided to get separated from him. So he broke into the house and he . . . my sister told him to leave and she was maybe six years older than me, so 11, actually. I didn't know what to do. So, he said if she ever yelled or got him to leave, to stab her or something like that, so she left and went to walk to the police station and then you know he left after that and I was just sitting there. Once he left, I hid under a pillow and then when the cops were there, it felt like I was just by myself still.

Joyce conveyed a deep sense of helplessness at that time. She remembers sitting, waiting, and wishing for her mom to come home. She was 5 years old and wanted her mom. Instead, for a long time, she had to remain alone, hiding under a pillow on a bed, and for a moment, she felt like the criminal. That feeling lasted long enough for her to know for sure that she didn't want to hurt her sister. The remembered emotions attached to that incident are pain and fear.

The expectation for change in her father is always present somewhere in her subconscious. She emphasized that if he changed, she would be there, but if he never changes, she wants no part of him. She found it devastating and expressed her feelings

this way: “You know it’s pretty horrible; it hurts sometimes but I still do love him and I still have forgiven him for everything that he’s done.”

Primary-Care Provider

Joyce didn’t have to worry about her family being divided up between relatives or strangers. Her father’s constant arrest and imprisonment didn’t change her living arrangements. She continued to live with her mother, whom she described as a “strong lady.” Her mom’s joy came from Joyce doing the best that she could in whatever task needed to be accomplished. She was a positive influence on Joyce in spite of the situations surrounding choices made to accommodate Joyce’s dad coming and going in their lives. However, when asked to give a little more detail about her mother, Joyce announced that her mother was accident-prone. To this day, she doesn’t understand why she is this way, but those accidents induced fear and concern for her own well-being. Joyce described one of those frightening experiences:

> So . . . she got in a car accident, I woke up and pretty much the whole church was in my house and it was Easter. So . . . they’re just getting us dressed. Like the men was with James and getting his suit and everything and then the girls were with us, my godmother . . . and I’m just like, where’s mommy, and they’re like, oh mommy just has to go somewhere, she’ll be back. And then when I saw mommy she had a neck brace and it was like, where were you?

On reflection, Joyce said that she seemed to have had her share of accidents, too; actually, nearly every 6 years. She commented:

> When I was 6, I bumped my lip, and I got stitches on my lip . . . I was just running around the coffee table and then when I was 12 or a little older, I was standing on the table and my mom told me to get down but I wasn’t listening and I fell back. I was in a coma and then I woke up. The last one was the firecracker. It blew off three of my fingers and nobody was home. So, that time I freaked out.

Joyce seemed unphased by her two-fingered hand and continued to unfold her story in small doses, giving the impression that she was glad to share. Her church involvement was orchestrated by her mom, and in Joyce's estimation, it was a good decision. Joyce remembers being quite young. The religious environment kept their lives somewhat normal most of the time. On most days, their religious life kept at bay the anxiety about something bad happening. But, although Joyce's mom used church to help her daughter feel safe, Joyce still held troublesome thoughts about her dad that helped to inspire such words to describe their relationship as *scary, confusing, loving, halfway*, and *weird* to show how complex and strange it all was to her.

School Life

Joyce had a shaky start in the first grade. Even at that tender age, she somehow was affected by the strain of her family life. Instinctively, she kept quiet about her dad. Actually, she told her teacher at that time that her dad died in a car accident. Joyce's untruth went deeper than desiring to avoid homework; she indicated that up until the uttering of that dreadful lie, she had not mentioned her dad's name. The punishment, coupled with the memory of what she did and would do later in the academic environment, caused her to indicate that she considered her school life horrible.

Unfortunately, Joyce would be considered a troubled student who was often at risk of academic failure.. To help her succeed, Joyce's mother took action quickly by moving the family to a better location for academic learning. Joyce was 7, and as she settled into her new environment, she seemed to be fine. But, as the years passed, the negative behavior surfaced and caused concern at home. Failure to do homework became a sore spot between her and her mother to the extent that her mother warned that she

would take her out of public school and enroll her in a private facility. Joyce remembers her mom saying, “You could always do your best, and as long as you do your best, then I’m happy. If your best is a B, I’m happy, if your best is a C, I’m happy.”

Joyce’s mom was so determined to have her child succeed that when Joyce failed ninth grade, she made good on her warning. For Joyce, the physical removal convinced her that if she continued on that failure pathway, her mom would send her to military school to save her. So she buckled down and flourished in her new high school, passing examinations and graduating, allowing herself to reach greater academic heights.

Joyce made it clear that throughout her schooling she felt alone; no one offered her support. She still kept her dad’s criminality and inmate status private. She told no one in school, including friends. Actually, during this time in her life, she relied on church support. This reliance led her to accept the offer from many of the church men to become her surrogate dads. Even her pastor assumed the role of a father, along with her older brother, 18 years her senior. Yet, Joyce still envied children with a present dad and had moments when she longed for her biological dad to be there for her. To explain her intense longing and the complexity of her life, she recalled:

> Yeah, I want him there to be able to take that photo with Mom when I had my first day at school. But, on the other side, I was afraid of him at times but I still did love him and even now I still love him. So, he wrote me a letter, so I wrote him back and I said I’m sorry if I may have ever offended you or if ever I had an attitude towards you, I apologize. And then he said, you don’t have to apologize and he apologized but then he said what have I done? So I told him some of the things that have frightened me and he was not happy. I told him about my sister. So I just stopped writing, cause if I saw he wasn’t going to change, I just said let him go.

Even though Joyce had hopes of a connection through letter writing with her dad, she understood the significance of his one letter to her. She had an epiphany. Joyce never

visited him in prison. To this day, he still tries to connect with her from prison through letters infused with manipulative accusations phrased to solicit a response.

Learning to Cope

How much Joyce's secret affected her decisions is debatable. She insisted that her father's criminal activities and his constant imprisonment had little to no effect on her personal decisions. But, it did take her mom's attachment to her and her own maturing for her to learn some coping mechanisms that steered her toward positive outcomes.

However, the huge secret about her father did cause great distress for her to the extent that she fell into a depressed state by the seventh grade. Joyce realized that she needed help and once again relied on her mom, who took the advice from Joyce's social worker and got her into therapy. Joyce was made to take medication that exacerbated her situation. In fact, the day came when Joyce stopped medicating herself, looked inside herself, and realized that the time had come for change. She needed to find inner strength, so she discovered how powerful words can be when expressed to convey strong feelings. This was the beginning of her poetry writing. She put her pain and her internal struggles on paper. She captured every feeling, as is evident in this poem:

> Society . . . . I live in a world full of hurt, sorry and pain. Where you see flowers is where friends were slain. Cops came but no one saw nothing. So, it's gonna be the innocent black men that we're cuffing. Stuffing him into a jail cell. While our Nubian queen walk on crack rocks that sell, just like her body. She dresses like this because when she was little old men called her hottie. Got three kids plus one on the way. Wishing the babies' fathers would just stay. Still to this day, she can't read because nobody cared for her to succeed. Nobody cared for her to plant that seed. Nobody cared to see her real need, so she didn't take heed. She got no money so her children she can't feed. God please look in her heart so you will see how much red blood she bleeds. And our men say society's keeping them down. Forgetting we used to wear crowns. We are society the world in its trueness. When we were little, we would say, we'd never do this. Now, we hypocrites give our closeted demons a kiss. The problems we try to solve are always hit and miss. Just like lightning, we are

> frightening instead of enlightening. We are daring and scaring our kids into paths taken and untaken by us, causing fuss among the masses. This gets under and over my skin like rashes. Succumbing to the image of a fascist, ruling with absolution but to this problem, no solution.

From Joyce's very own environment, she had the material to write how she felt about the experiences of others that had an enormous effect on her. Closer to home, she thought about her mother's choices. Her mom became pregnant by age 16, and then drugs and other things were introduced in her life by her drug-dealer father and by the drug-ridden environment that she was forced to live in.

Joyce was an observer of the human condition in her neighborhoods and became adamant about not being trapped by the daunting lifestyles. She made a decision to stay as far as possible away from all of it. Her learning to cope is seen in her response to the external influences. She said, "Drugs . . . I see people around and how they act . . . they want for it and now they need something and I would never want to need something that bad."

Joyce displayed a determination to choose a different pathway for her life. She continued to express her feelings through poetry. In her discourse, she revealed that she no longer feared her thoughts. She allowed her distress or sad thoughts to be immortalized on paper, freeing her forever of carrying around pent-up feelings that had the power to derail her positive development.

Resilience and Successes

The pride of accomplishment resonated with Joyce, and she offered her thoughts about having a resilient spirit. When she considered resiliency, she provided her view: "strong minded, on your own and you stand alone." She was keenly aware of her bumpy

path, and yet she was pleased that the struggles and the challenges have strengthened her resolve to be all right. Currently, Joyce is happy with herself. She feels confident, and through her microscopic lens of self-evaluation, she sees herself as beautiful and unique. She actually likes how she turned out.

Joyce has big dreams, and she hopes to realize each one. She sees her work life evolving from being an airport parking attendant, to a security guard, to a police officer, to finally a defender of justice. Her dad's criminal life and his behaviors toward her have inspired her to one day obtain a law degree and become an advocate for children. Her focus is on their safety. After all, she feared her dad so many times, feeling insecure and unsafe with him. Joyce is compelled to help the unknown young strangers in the future.

She is hopeful about the possibilities for her future. She is ambitious and cannot wait to show the world what a child of a prisoner can achieve. In a very thoughtful, reflective mood, Joyce shared how she measures success: "I measure . . . .pretty much . . . . well with me I think it's every individual . . . .how they see it, like what makes you happy and what made you so happy at that moment that you felt that you couldn't do it but you did."

Looking backward, she again visited her high-school days and counted her successful completion important enough to set the tone in her life for the push she needed to get herself in a position to help her family. She mulled over the idea of speaking to other children who are presently experiencing parental incarceration, and then she spoke the following words:

> I would tell them that they're amazing and that they can do anything that anybody else can do. It doesn't matter that their parents are in jail, because they're not their parent. I wouldn't pay attention to what people think about you, because there's always going to be somebody's opinion that's not nice towards you.

But, Joyce's follow-up message was a personal testimony. She made sure to include in her imaginary speech to children of prisoners that they have the power to do anything in life they choose to do. To help them avoid the pitfalls and not feel sorry for being placed in circumstances out of their control, she felt that they should hear a stronger admonition:

> Well, I would tell them not to feel sorry for themselves 'cause they're alive first, and not everybody else has the privilege to be like I'm alive you know and I could say I'm in high school and I have a chance that my father didn't have a chance to do or my mother didn't have a chance. Do whatever they want to do, as long as it's good.

This turned out to be a good exercise for Joyce because it gave her the opportunity to reflect on what mattered most to her. It simply is seeing herself controlling her own destiny, and that includes the relationship with her boyfriend. She has plans for him in 5 years. But, currently, she is a watcher. She is interested in everything he does because he is a felon. He went to jail. He has shown her so far that he deserves her trust. According to her, his determination to turn his life around is seen in his interaction with society; he works and exhibits readiness for college. Joyce says:

> He showed me that you can't just stereotype the people that did go to jail. But . . . that's pretty much it, just searching out him and seeing how he is and how he would be as that person, 'cause how he acts now is important. So I want to be able to tell my parents . . . my kids that your dad wasn't in jail and he didn't do this stuff.

Joyce has come far because of her response to the wide array of consequences of her father's behaviors, arrest, and imprisonments. She has learned some life lessons: to always love, always forgive, and not hate people. But her imaginary message of hope stirred emotions within her and caused her to think about the success motivators in her life. They were her mother, hope (for a better life), and the desire to prove that she could make something of herself.

Joyce leaves a challenge to all those people interested in child development to be careful of underestimating children of prisoners. The needs of all children are the same. They need to feel safe and secure. So the challenge is to open minds and see how children with imprisoned parents truly live.

April: I Still Have a Smile on My Face

Introduction

April is 21 years old. She is a third-year college student who is looking forward to her senior year. She works part time as a guest services receptionist. April has an older brother and a younger sister, with whom she lived until recently.

April has been impacted by her father's imprisonment from the age of 5. Prior to her father's first arrest and incarceration, she lived with both parents, although they were not married. After the many arrests of her father, she continued to be cared for by her mother. In her pre-interview responses, April stresses the one prison sentence but directs attention to the countless times her father was in and out of county jail. Her answer to why she has never exhibited criminal behavior gives some insight to how she thinks:

> As a child my mother sheltered me probably to decrease my chances of making bad decisions. Though I hated being in the house and not being able to do the things my other friends were doing . . . it worked! Being a homebody is still something I've never been a fan of. I could never imagine every day behind bars, being told when to do simple tasks as bathing, using the restroom, eating, or talking on the telephone.

She speaks bluntly about what it would take to lessen the impact of parental incarceration on her and others. She envisions education being the gateway that opens up a better world, one filled with possibilities. From childhood, she has believed the key to achievement is commitment to goal-setting and that success will come from meeting each goal. This pathway will minimize negative influences.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

April's childhood was indeed different. She had known since the age of 5 that her father's constant absences from her life were caused by his behavior. He was in and out of jail. Until she was 11 or 12, she consciously didn't think much about his absences. But her father's pending prison sentence of 8 years brought her grandmother to her home to break the news to her. For April's family, this was a cause for great concern. The whole family had dinner with her father the night before his imprisonment and continued to show support the next morning by going to court. April chose to downplay this bad scene and to remember what made her feel good about her father. A week earlier, she had spent happier moments with him on a very snowy day. Her father spent an entire day with April and her siblings, carrying them up and down the neighborhood street so they could enjoy sledding.

There was a reason for April's reluctance to hold on to bad memories; she had so many. Her mother had taught her to cast them aside and just smile. The challenges at home were actually too enormous for a child. Yet throughout her childhood she endured the upheavals. When the turmoil caused her to defend her mother, she would retreat afterward to her room alone and express her pain through poetry. She wrote only when she was at her lowest point and used this skill to keep her mind distracted from all else. She managed to keep silent about the awful violence. She didn't even bring her grandmother into her confidence because she thought at the time that it was no one's business. As she put it: "I didn't like people to be in my business, not to say it was my business . . . it's just my grandmother but I didn't like her to know."

She had a violent father. He physically abused her mother repeatedly. Each time he got out of jail, he was allowed back into the home by her mother. The beatings would take place, and April would always put herself in the middle of the altercations to try to save her mother. She was a child who didn't understand the danger, but one day she saw something done to her mother by her father that made her lament:

> When is this going to stop? . . . how could she love him or how could she even believe half of the things that she believed that comes out of his mouth when he treats her like he does? . . . You're my mother and you basically tell me . . . everything from time I was born, how to live, and you tell me you don't need a person that's going to treat you this way, but yet, you're still involved with the person that treats you this way. It didn't make sense to me, but after a while I just figured, well I guess that's what love is. I don't want that for myself but I guess that's what it really means to love someone that much that you'll put up with whatever . . .

These were scary times for April, especially when her father was released from one of the county jails. She doesn't remember how many times he was in jail because, at some period, she just stopped counting. April knew that it was just a matter of time before he would show up at the house. The cycle of violence would be repeated; he would return to jail, and April would feel relief. She was not affected by the separation, but she was affected by the thought of him returning home. The escalation of violence brought such trauma to her young life that she pretended that she was fine and the difficult times were normal.

April didn't identify with her father; actually, during those early years, she had little or no relationship with him. She described their relationship as nonexistent and fake. She felt that he was unworthy and deserved her resentment. To be a child of a felon caused her to muse:

> I think that has nothing to do with who I am as a person. It has nothing to do with anything. I don't think that it affected me in any way as far as who I am today in a negative way, so, he was my father and that's all he was to me. Great love for him at

> that time, I can't say that I did. I would tell him that I loved him because I know that's what I'm supposed to do because he's my father, but did I respect him? No, not really. There were other factors, other things that I saw him do as a child that it just made me lose respect. I think that kind of had an effect on his relationship with me.

The no-respect attitude remains because she witnessed and endured so much because of him. She hid the weight of his abusive nature behind her smile but would speak strong words to her father when she became embroiled in his cowardly acts against her mother.

Family life was odd, even on normal days, because April's father also had a habit of sleeping during the daylight hours when she was up and about. When he was awake at night, she was asleep, so she really had little contact with him. April's sister, who was too young to attend formal school, spent her days with him and became Daddy's little girl. Yet, April remembered that the extent of their connection was his material provision for her when he took her to a store and purchased things for her. He also would put money in her hands. His act of kindness during those occasions did not make up for his violent behavior. She escaped him often in her mind.

She managed to survive her household challenges and without discussion, she and her family remained silent about the extent of the violence. April's family didn't willingly share their misery with the extended family, the closer members knew that something wasn't right. The environment became conducive to talk, and April explained what would happen:

> They would only hear when something bad happened so they already had an idea of how he was and how they didn't like him. . . . It caused problems with my mother and her sisters, and other people in the family. My aunt. . . would say, oh you can come stay with us, but it was only when problems would happen, any time other than that, everything was fine in my eyes. . . . Maybe I don't know half the story or I don't see everything.

On rare occasions, April heard her father promise to do better, but he failed to change his violent ways. Throughout April's childhood, she traveled with her mother and siblings to the county jails to experience the shameful no-contact visits with her father. The glass partitions were the major obstacles to touching him. However, once a year, if he had exhibited good behavior, April could hug her father because the no-contact rule would be lifted to accommodate the family. Those visits were filled with promises from her father to be a changed man when he was released. Over and over he promised them that he would do better, and April listened with skepticism. She would mull over his words as they rode the usual 45 minutes to return home. He didn't change, but one time his address did:

> And then there was a time when he was incarcerated in New York. That whole process, it would be a whole day we'd have to take out to go to see him and still it was like, pointless for us to be there, we get 10 minutes to talk to him and the rest he talked to my mother about whatever they talked about.

Primary-Care Provider

This lone memory brought April back to the dinner night, the gathering, and the 8-year prison sentence of her father. But jail was the usual place for her father, not prison. This occurrence was new to her and the family. The long sentence was the evidence of the seriousness of the offense. She lamented, "The only thing that I worried was about money. I knew that my mother would have to take care of everything that had to do with bills and money on her own."

April was bothered by the inferior status placed upon her mother by her father. At that time, she somewhat blamed her mother for allowing the muscles and the money to

sweep her off her feet. Her mother's relationship with her father sent April the wrong message. April felt like that's how things would be forever. April recounted:

> I decided well, as a child I was kind of tomboyish. . . . Up until then because I have an older brother and hung out with him and his friends and I felt like they treated me like I was one of them. . . . I never wanted to ever have to depend on a guy for anything. . . . I felt that's what she did.

April understood that it was not the time to demand answers from her mother; it was a time to help any way that she could in lightening her mother's burden. However, April, the early teen, continued to believe that she was emotionally fine and life would go on in the same way despite this new development. This was her life; her father was always in trouble. This was normal. She learned to cope with the new situation because she knew that she had no choice.

April reflected:

> I didn't shut down. I think at the time it made my brother and my sister and myself and my mother closer because we would joke about everything. My mother would tell me that it was always important to have a smiling face, no matter what you're going through, it doesn't matter, you keep your head up and keep a smile on your face. That's how I coped.

The period of imprisonment for April's father brought religion into their lives through her grandmother. Under her grandmother's influence, she went to church regularly. She credits her grandmother for caring enough to convince her mother that this was good for the family. Consequently, April could be seen in church every Sunday. April joined the choir, took Bible study, and had a healthy respect for the effects the religious environment had on her life. She felt grounded enough to be steered away from the wrongdoing that she saw others do.

April remembers well her mother's care. The little things of a positive nature that came to mind revealed a bond between them. For instance, April's mother had to take an

early train to work each day, so she would wake April at 5:00 every morning and straighten April's hair with a hot comb on the stove, getting her ready for school. Her mother found a way to have private time with her middle child.

April remembered another incident that highlighted an unhappy scene with her mother and clearly showed the complexity of their lives. Before April's father went to prison, something very bad happened between her mother and him. April and her siblings were moved to her grandmother's home because it wasn't wise to have them remain in their home environment. April said that her mistake was that she told the truth about her new living arrangements to a school nurse. At the time, her grandmother lived three towns over from the school. When her mother found out that the nurse knew her business, she yelled over a telephone to April, making matters worse. April didn't understand what she was supposed to do in such a situation. It became a serious issue because teachers began to ask questions, and the nurse followed up with additional questions. Unknowingly, April was in the middle of her mother's problem and felt betrayed by all the adults involved.

Moreover, April was embarrassed and recognized the anger in her mother's voice and imagined what she would face at home. So, that day, April was so distraught that she cried openly in the school nurse's office as her classmates walked by after lunch. Everyone saw her crying. By the next day, April walked in the school and acted like nothing had happened the day before. April confessed that she had always done that when she had to face unpleasantness.

School Life

April recalled feeling like an outcast or different when she spotted children attached to their fathers, especially when she saw the closeness. She didn't have that with her father, and it bothered her. She hated to hear a girl say that she was going to enjoy an activity with her father or that she was known as Daddy's girl. April struggled with mixed emotions because as much as she had denied those longings for years, they were there. She dreaded someone asking her at school what she did on a particular weekend because she would have to say that she went to see her father in prison.

School became the one place where April freed herself of the turmoil at home. She actually willed herself to put aside the array of troubles at home and focus on the academic world to which she had become a part. She said:

> In school, I never let it affect me because it was important, that was home life and this was school life. I kind of felt like when I went to school I just kind of be free and just be myself, so of course I was a clown in my classes. I did my work and I was probably a disruptive student but that was me. I was a clown, my teachers loved me because they just knew how I was but at the same time . . . I would see things as a child; know that I wouldn't want that for myself. So, in order to do that I always knew it was in my brain if you go to school and get good grades, then you don't have to worry about anything . . . that's what was always in my head. . . . If only you go to school and you do what you have to then you'll be okay in life as long as you, like my mother says, you have a smile on your face. Those two things together stuck in my head and it made me not want certain things, other things to put me off track.

Once April reached high school, she made good grades, looked happy, smiled often, and strived for success. Although she clowned around in classes, her academic performance wasn't compromised. She had excellent study habits. April easily made a grade-point average of 3.7 when she graduated, showing that she allowed nothing to interfere with her plan to succeed. Nevertheless, she enjoyed incurring one particular infraction at school: She and her friends discovered that they could get away with

skipping class by insisting that they needed to see the school psychologist. By the second part of her freshman year, she and the same friends had evolved into a small group. Eventually, they met formally with the psychologist once a week and talked about "any and everything." For April, this was a needed respite from her personal worries. It was in those group sessions that she opened up about being the child of a prisoner. She trusted the psychologist and her closest friends with the news about her father.

To keep her mind off a lot of negative things, April sought out positive things to do during and after school. In middle school, she played basketball. She kept herself occupied in high school by participating in extracurricular activities such as playing sports or serving on the student council. She loved everything. She was a member of the cross-country and softball teams. April blossomed, and although her mother couldn't attend her games, she was not discouraged. Her mother had to work, but she made sure that April's uniform was ironed and ready when needed. April felt the love from her mother and saw this act as another positive little thing that counted with her. April cared little for extravagant things, but she indeed was affected by the pressed uniform and the encouragement from her mother each time she was to go on the field.

Throughout her high-school years, she feared that someone would ask her about her inmate father. As a result, she had to appear to be the class clown and the student who always smiled. She feared showing weakness in the form of tears but eventually faced the truth; she was learning how to cope.

Learning to Cope

There were enough negative life experiences in young April's world to have crippled her but she showed skill in finding ways to cope. She wouldn't focus on the bad

things in her life. She peeled back the layers of herself and found the good and held onto it. Her strength emerged as she began to deal with her plight honestly and not hiding from the bad moments. She did prefer to remember the better times with her mother, even the one visit with her to the jail that turned out unexpectedly full of laughter and jokes because no one steered the conversation toward her father's volatile personality. April was learning how to cope with a terrible situation that she couldn't control or fix.

When she acted like she didn't have a care in the world, she was coping. When she locked herself away in her room and wrote poetry, she was learning to cope. The struggles were many, but she opened up to a school psychologist and her closest friends, and at that moment, she learned that she was able to cope. She didn't shut down after seeing such violence; she clowned and smiled her way through school.

Resilience and Successes

There was an awakening of resiliency within April as she became older. It was evident in her response to what she might say to motivate other children of prisoners. She boldly expressed her strong feelings about the multiple paths she had traveled to find success. She would tell them

> my story from beginning to end, no holding back any feelings, any events that happened; I would tell them my story and then at the end of it I would say, look at me now, I've persevered, I got through all of this and I still have a smile on my face.

Somehow, the smile has remained her signature. It now denotes a can-do spirit and a freedom that comes from shedding the weight of her parents' problems and learning to make good decisions for herself. When April thought of her real-life experiences, her mind pondered her successes that made her know that she was quite resilient. She thought of the first day of her freshman year when a teacher in one of her

classes asked the class, “Where do you see yourself in 5 years, and where do you see yourself in 10 years?” From that moment, she was determined to fulfill every item on her dream list, and she did so with swiftness. She was an achiever and today recognizes that she has work to do on accomplishing the ultimate dream of getting married. She believes in setting goals and then working to make them happen no matter what obstacles stand in the way. She said that she started in kindergarten and the evidence was in

> an envelope with all my awards that I got throughout school, certificates for student council and my sports. When I got into high school, my first two years I did basket ball, I did varsity track for all four years. We had a women’s studies meeting group that we made up but it counted as an organization for the school . . . and then college, I joined the leadership group for 3 years.

April believes that she is on track, and she quickly explains she views success as having self-direction; actually it is mostly self-direction with support from others. She had a school psychologist who listened, a mother who encouraged her, and a young male resident adviser in the dormitory who saw leadership qualities in her and suggested she become a part of the leadership group on campus. The group is called “Emerging Leaders,” and she fully embraced learning new and valuable leadership skills over a period of a year. Then April joined the University Activities Board and with her fellow members took on the responsibility for administering a budget of $35,000 each school year. They met every week and had to make good decisions for fellow students. April tackled this responsibility as she had done other responsibilities in the past.

April is an independent thinker and again this was evident in her turning down the opportunity to become a member of a sorority. She investigated and evaluated the benefits of pledging and decided that it held no value for her and saw the process as illegal. She ponders the practical side of herself. She is aware of the positive legacy that

she must follow. Today, she stands on the shoulders of her two aunts, who graduated from college and went on to get their master's degrees. She was at their graduation, along with her family. This was a proud moment for all of them. April was inspired on that graduation day because they were the first to have master's degrees, and April pledged to herself

> I want to do that . . . I thought it was amazing, like I wanted to throw their hats. This is so cool and to think they wanted us to see that . . . and then for them to get their master's. . . . My aunt was a substitute in my school district. I have my aunt as a teacher and people just thought that was like so cool. I know my grandfather graduated from the South which was like a big deal because he was an African-American going to a school of secondary like education and graduating.

According to April, her extended family, namely her aunts, suffered more than she did during their childhood, and yet they managed to rise above their circumstances and achieve in life. She is determined to do the same. The most ambitious thing April wants to do is finish her early-childhood education and psychology degree and then practice as a psychologist. She sees her personable nature as an asset in her helping children.

What matters most to her as she journeys forward is making her mother feel pride and joy in her accomplishments. In spite of the egregious things that her mother allowed, she raised April. And April couldn't imagine hurting her through disappointment. Her mother is her hero. April explained it this way:

> I've seen her go through so much, knowing that her childhood wasn't the best. She had my brother when she was a junior in high school and she had me a month after she graduated her senior year. She finished school on time, she went and got an associate's degree, and now making some big bucks. It took her time to get there, but she did it. While my father was away, she bought a house, she stayed with my aunt for a little bit and in two years she was able to save enough money to buy a house, to buy a car, to keep us healthy, food on the table, those are important, we were important to her, so I feel like I owe her that. I saw her changes. So it made me a stronger person and we always had those talks . . . you don't want this for yourself.

> I did it, but I'm telling you, as a person who's been through it, this is not what you want.

Along her way to maturity, April learned that she never wants to experience that kind of violence against her. She also wishes that it never happens to anyone close to her. Most people don't want to spend any part of their life in jail or prison. April believes that humans hate isolation of any kind and don't want to be subservient. She asks a rhetorical question: "Why do you think so many people commit suicide in prison or in jail?" and then she answers, "Because they can't take it, it's torture, and why would you want that for yourself?"

To scholars and practitioners in the field, April would like to make it known that positive results come from the worst situations. A case in point is her own experience of having a father in and out of jail and an inmate of the prison system. She survived; it doesn't affect everyone negatively. She blocked it out and knows for sure that everybody copes differently. She backs this statement with the following insight:

> There's no way to get through any type of adversity without the ability to cope. You can't get through hard times without coping. And everybody copes differently. Well, people who follow in the wrong path, I think that the main thing is that they either don't have someone there to push them, to drive them to do better. I don't think it has anything to do with the fact that I had a father that was incarcerated and that means that I'm going to follow a negative path because I didn't and if I had, it would have only been because I felt like that's all. . . . the only option left for me because I wasn't taught that there were other options in life. I wasn't taught that . . . you need to go to school and you need to graduate and go to college and move forward in life . . . you'll be happy this way. If I wasn't taught that, then I probably would think that it's okay to be in jail. . . . I'm going to make fast money and I'm going to do a little bit of time and I'll be home and can get back . . . happy and with my money. I wasn't taught that. That's only temporary satisfaction, that's not a lifetime of being satisfied.

April's greatest disappointment was in expecting people to give you what they are unable to give. Her father is an example of her desiring what her father couldn't give her: a changed man. To this day, she holds it against him because he made promises to his

young adult daughter and he didn't follow through. She is left scared in a way; she doesn't trust many people, and this distrust is directly connected to the broken promises of her father. She is on her own now and avoids conversing with her mother about her father.

Leon: If I Can Make It, Then Anybody Can

Introduction

Leon is 20 years old and the child of a father who went to jail multiple times over a period of 12 years. Leon was just a little boy (around 9 years old) when his home life was interrupted by the prison system. His parents were married and they all lived together until the first arrest and incarceration. He has an older brother and younger sister, and he is attached to both.

The years without a father impacted his development. As much as he was excited when his father was released during his last year in middle school, he was also scared. His father was a stranger to him. It follows, then, that Leon met a man whom he didn't know anymore.

Leon has graduated from high school and now works at Home Depot. He mused over what would lessen the impact of parental incarceration on children and concluded that mothers and fathers need to become more responsible for their actions and be willing to admit "the way they went about life was wrong." Leon felt that people would respond to him in a different way. In fact, he settled on a few words to tell why he never exhibited criminal behavior: "My mom brought us up in church, making sure we knew the father, which is God. I also saw what criminal behavior did for my father and didn't and don't want to follow the example."

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

Leon's childhood home was in the Mid-Atlantic region. He has never moved too far from his birthplace. He was a young boy when he noticed small changes and a sad mother in his home. As he put it:

> I think I noticed that my dad wasn't there when my mom started sending us to my grandmother's house for school. She would go in a corner and cry. I knew that it was hard on her because she kept crying. I didn't understand why she was crying, I thought it was because we went to church and she might be getting a blessing or something like that.

What Leon really noticed was that his mother, without fuss, took on the role of both parents. At first she said nothing about his father being incarcerated. The crying was an indicator that something bad must have happened, but no adult in his life spoke to him about it. Frequently, he would catch his mother crying, and so he waited. Finally, his mother broke the news that his father, indeed, was locked up.

Leon vividly remembers being upset when he heard the news. He and his family would have to contend with the prison system. He was filled with resentment toward his father and acted out by not acknowledging him when he was made to visit him behind bars. Over time, his father tried to reach out to him but Leon rejected his efforts. He didn't trust his sincerity. By that time, Leon was struggling internally with the knowledge that he had a criminal for a father. He didn't like how it made him feel, so he placed the blame for his misery on his father. He felt that he didn't need him because he hadn't been there for such a long time. Leon insisted that "he was not there from the beginning."

At home, Leon continued to see a breakdown of a normal family life. He was embarrassed and held his dad accountable for not being there on a daily basis. Leon recognized that his resentment was fueled by the absence. He didn't care whether he

needed his father or not; he felt that he should be available physically to him. He felt helpless during this period; he was just a boy. He expressed his helpless feelings:

> I didn't need him. I didn't need him. He didn't do anything for me. Wasn't doing anything for my mom; I was having a dysfunctional home. I didn't see him arrested. He told me what happened. I resented just knowing that he was gone that long. That meant my mom had to pay rent and cook and everything was on her. There was no equal balance. She had to do it all on her own. I had to take on the responsibility of having a [sister] to look after.

Leon was made to grow up too fast. He was bothered by his existing world. He felt challenged due to the adult burdens that caused him his carefree childhood. He wanted to play. He knew that his life was not normal but he had no idea how to fix it. So he held onto the animosity, sadness, disrespect, and relationship distance between himself and his father. Life without his father brought his family to the church, and the spiritual nourishment that came from practically living in church kept his family moving forward. The negative consequences of incarceration were diminished for long periods, and Leon was grateful. He said, "We always had the church that was helping. I played the drums, my older brother played piano, my sister followed behind me and my brother."

Life continued in this way, and Leon adjusted, but challenges in his life would arise unexpectedly. He described one notable challenge:

> I had signed up for a baseball team. I would see other kids with both parents. My mom was just there by herself. All the other kids, they got their father there with them doing practice runs. Me seeing the fathers there doing what they need to do for their kids, I asked myself, where in the world is my father?

It was obvious that Leon felt an emotional tug and maybe jealousy because his father wasn't there for him. For sure, at that moment, he felt a longing for his father. He wanted to practice ball with him. Instead, his mother stepped in for her husband and practiced ball-throwing with him. But, it wasn't satisfactory to him; it wasn't the same.

He would end up catching ball with his older brother. Leon discovered early on that it was these moments that caused him the greatest pain.

Primary-Care Provider

Leon lived in an apartment with his mother. Although she had her own troubles, she tried to be there for her children. However, Leon credits his grandmother, whom he calls his second mother, and his uncle for their tireless support to him. His grandmother's influence was felt throughout his childhood. She kept a close watch over the whole family. Leon felt her affection strongly when she was giving counsel about school responsibility and how important it was to honor God. It was his grandmother who made sure that he and his siblings did their homework and made sure that they ate. She would give Leon and his brother her full attention when they needed to be taught things that would help them to grow into fine young men. She never forgot to direct their path, and for that, Leon holds her in high esteem.

As time passed, Leon felt that he was expected to keep his father's imprisonment a secret. It wasn't anything that his family said to him directly; it was just a feeling. If he was asked by people outside of the home, he told the truth. His friends were inquisitive. From time to time, they would ask for more details, such as how long his father's sentence was and what criminal act he committed. He wasn't offended that they asked. But, at home, things were supposed to be handled a little differently:

> My mom didn't like me to bring it up, even if I was around distant family. She would say if you don't need to tell them, then don't tell them. Why does it have to be a secret? I know about it already. . . . To keep a secret, it was difficult because I had friends that asked where's your father? Where's your father? so I would say he's in jail. I told the truth.

This put Leon in a bind because he always wanted to be obedient to his mother. He trusted her. Since early in his childhood, her parenting skills always involved giving him choices. To this day, he respects that phase of his upbringing. He noted:

> She never said to me, this is what you need to do; this is what you should do. She always said, well, this is what's going to happen if you do this, but it would be smarter to do this. She never told me . . . this is what you are doing because kids don't respond to that well. . . . so I always respected my mom for that. That's how my uncle was too. He knew how to talk to us.

For some reason, on this one matter concerning his inmate father, Leon's mother behaved differently. She sent a message to him by her demeanor that she wanted his silence. He remained perplexed because this was out of character for her, especially when she prided herself in not telling lies.

School Life

As Leon entered this phase of his education journey, his father was about to be released back into the community. In fact, he came home soon after Leon settled into school. This was a new situation. Leon had to adjust to having his father, the stranger, around. At the time, Leon felt that these two major events in his life—entrance into high school and his father presence—were too much to handle at once. Everything seemed to happen too fast.

High school presented its own set of problems for Leon. He grew from a boy to a young man, and he did not know how to appropriately handle the new stage in his life, especially concerning girls. They were all over the school. He missed being taught by his biological father, who was in and out of jail. The guidance that he needed in this area was never given to him by his mother. Actually, his mother thought that with his father gone, it was not her place to train him in social etiquette. By the 10th grade, he had made some

terrible mistakes and they would catch up with him later and cause regrets. His abnormal outlook about the treatment of girls could have been avoided if he had had a decent father who could have taught him about honor.

By Leon's observation, high school began smoothly. He spent most of his time getting to know other young people. He accepted that his father's imprisonment did affect him in unexpected ways. For example, around the time his father was going to be released, Leon's grades plunged. But there was a female teacher to whom he told the secret about his father without being asked. He just blurted it out to her that his father was in jail. She was the first woman to hear such information from him. After that, he said:

> She just wanted to reach out: Do you want to talk about it? Is there anything that you need? . . . Tell your parents to come in for teacher's conference. She would ask me different things and it made me want to tell her. . . . listen, both my parents aren't going to come because my dad is still in jail.

Sometimes, Leon really did think that this teacher heard nothing he said to her but when he began to really fail, she stepped in and rescued him from himself. She gave him what he so desperately needed: support. She helped him to improve his grades by making sure that he met with every teacher who was giving him a failing grade. She inspired him to get back on track. For Leon, the turnaround came when

> I started a new class. It was my math class that I started. It was algebra and I actually found something that I liked to do. So I don't know what it was I felt inside but it was something.

Leon remembered the teacher with such fondness because she remained concerned about him. Sometimes when he missed the bus for home, she drove him. She stopped and fed him and used the time to talk to him. She would assure him that everything was going to work out. He was motivated to achieve because he had a teacher,

friends, and a love of learning new things. Leon accepted the encouragement from those who cared for him, and he fed off it. His new path took him to graduation.

Learning to Cope

Leon had begun to adapt and find his way. School played a large role in his self-discovery. It wasn't easy. Then, at around age 16, Leon was confronted with a problem in the home situation. His father had been released after 12 years, and his mother allowed him to return to their home. Leon felt that he needed to express himself because he had no connection to the man in his house. The separation had been too long. Leon's chance came and he spoke:

> I started to cry when I was saying I hate you. Everybody was in the car and everybody was in shock, like you're really telling your father that you hate him. I told him that there's no reason for you to be here, you don't know how to be a father, you don't know how to respond to your kids and what they need and what they want. He didn't know what to say. He was in shock. I wanted him to feel my pain.

Leon told his father about his life. Leon struggled to connect after the speech. However, their relationship never improved. But Leon learned from that experience. He is still working on the relationship with his father. He has accepted that they might never be close. The streets have consumed his father, and he has given himself over to them, along with his prison experience, and that has made him aloof. Leon believes that he is unable to become close now to anyone. Leon, the once angry son, is mellow about their nonrelationship and looks to find that closeness with a father figure. Nevertheless, he knows for sure now that even his father deserves a second chance.

Leon is hopeful about a lot of things. He said:

> I was never a smoker or a drinker but there was one time when I actually felt like I was going to just slip up and just fall into everything. Lacking a father I found a good Father, God, and I noticed that you can overcome a lot of things when you have God

> in your life. And it is deeper than just human, deeper than just even a family sometimes.

Leon knows that there had to be some survival mechanism inside him because he has had moments in his young life when he felt his safety nets eroding, yet he held on. His 10th grade in high school came to mind:

> My brother was still in high school. I was in 10th and he was in 12th grade. My brother always looked out for me. . . . I'm looking over you. . . but when I realized that he was really graduating, I felt that aloneness that I felt when my dad was in prison. I felt I'm really here by myself now. And I felt since he ain't looking over me no more, then I guess I'm just going to do this, but, then I looked back and said, well if I can get over my father being in jail and make it through, then I can do high school.

Furthermore, Leon suggested that others who must go through the experience of having incarcerated parents find the strength or the person to assist them in rising above their circumstance. He has learned to do so, and he counsels them to forget about the surroundings and latch onto the possibilities. He considers himself lucky, and he wishes for them a fulfilled life. Leon considers the world too big to be missed and knows that others get trapped in the narrow world of the streets in neighborhoods. That is what his dad did. He notes:

> I need to be somebody to people outside. There's something bigger than just what is on the street. You can be somebody. You can do whatever you want to do. That's what I tell my son now. Even though he can't talk; he's 2 months, but I'm instilling in him now like you're going to be the next president.

Leon also recognized that he needed to be careful. The urge to have a father figure might not be the wisest decision if he took the wrong path and allowed the wrong person to come into his life. So he remained happy if not content with the steady, loving relationships of his grandmother, uncle, and mother. However, he exclaimed, "It took three people to make up for two parents!"

Resilience and Successes

When Leon thought about his own journey and the multiple paths that he had to travel, his attention automatically turned to his grandmother, his uncle, and his church. He went to church where he lived, but he had to attend school in the county of his grandmother because the schools there were better. His grandmother did her best for him, and he knew it. Without her help and nurturing, he could have lost his way altogether, so she is a contributor to his success.

He also credits his uncle for trying to be a surrogate father to him because the father in jail was his brother. His uncle gladly became part of their morning routine of driving the long distance to his grandmother's house. It felt right to Leon, even though his uncle "ninny-picked" most days. He felt safe with his uncle and loved that his uncle took a daily interest in seeing that they arrived safely. Today, Leon has great respect for his uncle. Leon considers him his biggest role model and his hero. He has tucked away his uncle's encouraging words, "You really could make it," and brings them forward in his consciousness when he needs to mull over them. Those few simple words have given him strength over the years.

What originally affected Leon's quality of resilience as he adapted and grew was his internal struggle with anger for his father's absence due to jail and the longing for guidance from him. He hated that he was not in his life. But, he had his family's support. He soon realized that he needed to depend on what was inside of him: strength. He attributes any success that he has to God. Whatever Leon is good at and puts out effort to accomplish that goal, he considers that his success. He believes that he has a future in the mathematical world and would like to combine his knowledge in sales with his talent in

math to fulfill his dreams for future success. As for right now, he is motivated because he knows that there are people beyond his family who are rooting for him; that's more than enough for him.

If he had to tell his story to help others like himself, Leon said that he would simply say:

> Don't let people discourage you. There is a rumor around that children can't do anything and *be* somebody because their fathers weren't. People don't even look at their moms. I'm standing here with qualities of my dad but I don't use the strengths that he had in a bad way; I use them in a good way. My motivation is to help people with their struggles. So make sure that you choose wisely because there are a lot of paths that you can take in your life and if I can make it then anybody can make it.

By contrast, Leon lives every day with the knowledge that there are some choices he should not have made for himself. He knows that he wouldn't have had a son if his dad was around to guide him. He was perplexed when he explained how disappointed his father was when he heard of Leon's birth. He remembers so well his father asking him, "What in the world are you doing? Why did you do this?" Leon was longing to respond by emphasizing that his father wasn't there when he needed him. Leon's own son will have him always, and this he made plain: "I want to be his Superman, I want to be the person that he goes to for advice. I don't want him to feel like he needs to answer to the streets because I'm not around."

Leon muses that, even with the blips in his life, he is satisfied with his progress and development into a man who does not fear dreaming. He believes his son can be another motivator for him to do what he needs to do to accomplish goals such as finishing school. Leon dreams of becoming an accountant. He doesn't think that is too ambitious. He wants to be married some day. He is realistic about the path he must travel. He knows that he has a more difficult journey because of the baby, but he is committed to making it.

He has expectations for his relationship with his father and confesses that it matters to him that he cannot seem to achieve the closeness that he desires. He wants it; he longs for it. He said:

> I expect him for as long as he's out of jail to make up for what my mom lost. I want him to make sure that he keeps my mom happy. . . . they're still together. She was with him through the whole 12 years. But, for me he can't do too much for me now. I am who I am. And even though he wasn't there, he is part of what made me who I am today.

For all those in the scholarly arena, he is a strong, independent African-American man "making it" in the broader world. The notion that he is an inmate's child and he is somehow defective is not right. Leon simply said:

> Don't judge a book by its cover. One's family can be messed up but you can't say everybody in that family is going to be the same way. . . . There's always two parents whether you believe it or not. You don't always have to turn out like your father because you're a man. You can actually have your mother's heart. So, don't ever judge a book by its cover.

Leon makes no excuses for his behavior or how his life has turned out so far. He leans on the premise that people will see beyond his felon father to understand that his struggles have just helped to confirm his resilience. He has felt the pain of separation, the embarrassment of having a criminal in his world who is his parent. But he had a grandmother, uncle, mother, teacher, friends, and the church to steady his course, and when he fell, they were there to catch him.

Rachel: Homeless and Didn't Know It

Introduction

Rachel is a 19-year-old with an associate's degree and is continuing college to fulfill her dreams. She is part of a federal work-study program and lives on the East Coast, in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Rachel is the middle child in a

family of three siblings: Rachel, an older brother, and a younger sister. Due to her family's circumstances, she wasn't able to share all of her childhood with both siblings. She never lived with her sister.

Rachel was very young (under 5 years old) when her father was imprisoned. His incarceration had little impact at that time because he didn't reside with her, and actually, he was like a stranger. She describes the news of his incarceration: "For some reason I never had that feeling like I just *needed* a father to survive. . . . It wasn't sad, but I wasn't overjoyed, either."

As Rachel got older, she found out that he was in and out of jail, a repeat offender. Information about him would come in snippets from others, including her mother, and so she had no idea how old she could have been when he was finally released from some county jail.

Up until age 4, Rachel saw him from time to time, and then she and her family lost track of him. More to the point, Rachel's mother was not married to him and had no lasting attachment. Moreover, Rachel's childhood years were filled with insurmountable challenges. However, one challenge she vowed to attack with noncompliance was simply not engaging in criminal behavior like her father. This choice was personal and would help to steer her life later as she developed and grew into a young woman.

The impact of incarceration would leave a mark on her life, but Rachel's strength was in her insightfulness. She believed that the impact of incarceration would lessen for all children of prisoners if the inmate parents framed their lives around good decisions, good moral conduct, and priorities that extended beyond themselves.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

Rachel's childhood was indeed complex. Her carefree toddler years were ripped from her because at that tender age she had to contend with acute change and confusion with little understanding of what it all meant. In one day's time, Rachel lost her familiar home and traveled far away to another part of the state to live because her stranger father had been incarcerated. Rachel remembered it well: "My mom just told me we weren't living there. So I was asking questions about him. She was telling me that he was in prison for like child support and stuff."

At that time, Rachel had no idea how difficult life was going to be for her in the future. She had a mother who liked to control the flow of personal information. In other words, she liked to keep her business private, so she didn't tell little Rachel then or later in childhood the whole story about the world of which she was a part. Instead, she dragged her child away from her beloved birthplace, and that decision affected Rachel. But the news about her father had little effect because he never had been a fixture in Rachel's life; he had never been a father to her. However, years later, she realized that "there is a difference between having someone take that position and having your own father."

It was a peculiar position in which Rachel found herself: no connection, no paternal bonding to her biological father. Close to her eighth year, Rachel was curious and bothered by the complete absence of her father from her life, so one day with no particular agenda, she went to her mother:

> It was a long period that went by. I remember just asking her one day out of the blue. We just came from school and asked what about him? What about my father? What's his name? I knew his name but well, no I didn't, because I was young and I haven't seen him. You got to know his name. Of course as I got older, she would tell me a

> little bit more and a little bit more but the way she told it . . . he was just in jail for a little bit of time here and there when she had my brother who is older than me. He would call her to bail him out sometimes because she was working. She was a school-crossing guard, so she was like part of the police department.

Rachel was still a youngster and thought like one. She surmised at the time that her father was a petty criminal committing as she called it "dumb stuff," such as neglecting to pay child support or being caught with "possession of something." She had no idea that what was not spoken to her revealed the truth about a life out of control due to drunkenness and drugs. This was a clearer picture of her father.

In unraveling Rachel's world, it became evident that the complexity of her life led her over many diverse paths. Rachel had a mother who continued to say things that led Rachel to believe that their lives were normal, but the reality was so different:

> As far as feeling different, I think the environment my mom kind of raised us in, not the best one but she kind of made it like "okay." She never put him down. She left him, it wasn't like he left us or he ran out and I've never felt different because I had my mom. My pastor took that role when I was five. I didn't know it then; I know it now so maybe that's why I didn't feel so left out because I had him. My mom was a single parent and he would help us out here and there. His wife would be kind enough to help us too. He had kids so he treated me like a daughter and I was able to call him Pop. I guess I saw the difference because I could never really get close with him because I knew he's not my father. I guess as I got older I could see the importance of having your own father.

After the family's relocation, Rachel had little or no chance at all to connect with her father because he never ventured far from her old community. She was never privy to the length of his sentencing, but she also never felt stigmatized because as she put it, "prison wasn't his main factor for being absent." However, no one in her new environment knew that she had a repeat offender for a father. In her interaction with new people over the years, Rachel allowed them to believe that her father was dead.

One of those paths led Rachel to live among strangers in her new community, where her unskilled mother had no safety net for her family. Rachel's mother had not considered the consequence of such a change and the alienation that would follow due to their circumstances. The church eventually became the family's life and thereby the support that was badly needed. For Rachel, some strangers became lasting friends, positive influences in her great time of need. Their guidance helped a little girl find her way through the maze of life and successfully develop into a young woman.

One path led to all the other paths that Rachel was condemned to travel throughout her childhood: the path of poverty that brought such misery to her life. Once again, Rachel recalled those days, those months, those years with such agony:

> We grew up so poor. My mom didn't go to college. She got her GED. It was hard times from then on; her being a single parent, we lived in a shelter system. It affected me a lot; the buses to go to school. We had to ride a minibus and my brother as he got older, he stopped. It was embarrassing in high school to have to get on a minibus that's associated with slow kids. And so I would leave class five minutes early before the kids would come out or just somehow try to get on the bus without them seeing me. . . . I slept with my mom until I was 15 because we had to share beds. The rooms were so small; me, my brother and my mom had to share a room. It was tough being in the shelter. You have curfews and if you broke your curfew, you got kicked out of the shelter, so it was a lot of pressure. We didn't have transportation. My mom would work long hours. I would see her struggle and that was just something I didn't want for my life.

Although church life was a source of escape, the problems never went away, and the difficulties became insurmountable and followed Rachel and her family to each shelter. Hence they moved continuously over a large area. Rachel's mother moved about with ease because she was born and raised in an urban setting, but her children were struggling just to survive.

There were days when their pastor took the long drive of over 45 minutes to take them to the church service. But Rachel would be mortified when he had to be told once

again that they had moved to another shelter, somewhere unfamiliar to him. However, they continued the pattern of attending church out of state. This was extremely hard on Rachel because they would return very late at night—more like early the next morning—because they would have to travel by public transportation. It eventually affected Rachel's desire to get up early for school. But she loved church.

Primary-Care Provider

When Rachel was 14, she and her family moved from the cold East Coast to a hot Southern state because Rachel's mother was sick of the shelter system and was looking for a cheaper, better life. Unfortunately, she didn't find it, and she had to return 1 year later with the children. Upon their return, they moved in with Rachel's maternal grandfather, who lived in a senior citizen's home. This was a very short arrangement. They had to move. Mother and children were once again in a spiraling condition. As Rachel explained:

> The first place was a garage and it was tiny. We stayed in there for a couple of months and then the people said that we had to move out because they were going to bring in their grandmother. I had to go back to my pastor and the first lady's house. Then my mom found another place and that was a basement. It was horrible. The heat was terrible. No stove! We had a hot plate and a little toaster oven — just trying to make it work. My mom was trying not to go back into the shelter system. It seemed like once you got in there, there was no getting out. It was just the bottom.

Nevertheless, Rachel and her small family ended up back in the system. Rachel's mother ran out of options. She couldn't afford to pay rent for a decent place for her children. The return to shelter life was filled with problems, and one came up quickly: The shelter began to charge for the one room, and Rachel's mother lacked the funds. Rachel found herself without a place to lay her head. This was a final blow to the family

unit, and Rachel was sent to live with her pastor and his wife until she graduated from high school.

A river separated Rachel from her family, and the miles between them became another hurdle. Even her mother understood that Rachel couldn't continue to get up at 3:00 in the morning in order to get to school on time from their temporary dwelling. At last, even Rachel admitted that the cycle of destitution was taxing. She remembers thinking, "I'm a homeless teen, and we got baskets. I would get free lunch, and then at Christmas time or Thanksgiving, they would call my mom and send baskets. . . . It wasn't the best thing."

There were moments when Rachel felt that the blame had to be placed on the shoulders of her mother, father, and even her brother for not reaching for more out of life. Their lack of education contributed greatly to their situation, and at 14, she tried unsuccessfully to work to help out. She just felt a need to do something. Later, she would say that she was filled with sorrow when she observed the struggle of her brother trying to provide for a wife and children. He was heading down the same path as their mother, and she saw failure in his future. His choices were going to derail his opportunity for success. It was so discouraging to see the struggle and know what it meant.

School Life

School became a refuge for Rachel in some ways. Depending on where she was living at any given time, she managed to arrive on time, remain awake, and learn. Rachel has vivid memories of her efforts that resulted in academic success. Those choices that came from desperation led her to see potential and a way out. She still remembers, "I'd

have to wake up at 5:00 in the morning to catch a 6:15 bus, and I don't have to be in school till about 9:00."

Throughout her school life, she had a small band of teachers that looked out for her. They gave her needed support. She would settle at lunchtime in their classrooms to be near them. She believes that they knew that she was a shelter child, but she never spoke those words aloud. Without Rachel talking about her life at school, especially having a father behind bars, she was still aware of other children like herself who were struggling, too. The stench of prison and its impact seemed normal to Rachel because she knew that even in church she could find children like herself who had a parent in jail or prison.

However, Rachel didn't identify with the person causing the prison stench. She felt that her father's numerous jail imprisonments had nothing to do with her. She also understood that criminal behavior wasn't good, and her schoolmates and churchmates knew it. The law had to have been broken, and the only innocent ones were the children. Their parents were locked up because they were criminals. But Rachel held on to the thought that her and the other children's personal identities were intact. It would be up to them by choice what path they would travel. She was ready to find her path.

Back at the pastor's house, she had been made aware of the importance of school. These two kindhearted people remained strict about academic excellence. They knew most of the teachers. They instilled a love for achieving by not allowing Rachel to settle on average grades. They inspired Rachel. They reminded her that school was work and every day counted and she had to be present in every class. Once again Rachel remembered:

> When I got to the house, it was unheard of to get lower than a B. . . . One time I got an A minus, my pastor was like Why did you get an A minus? One of the worse things is to have your pastor sit down and talk to you about your grade. Even before I moved into his house, my pastor took that role; he talked to us about the grade and everything. He didn't believe in missing school to go to church because it would make the church look bad. School was everything to them and now he tells me I'm proud of you.

Rachel's pastor did everything that he knew how to do to keep her on track in school and to give her other options for her future. He wanted her to dream big. Through her tenacity, Rachel had proved that she possessed the strength within; he saw a better life for her, and he made sure to redirect her path. He wanted to erase some of her mother's wrong messages and to do it in such a way that Rachel would positively respond. She did. Her motivation was "not wanting to be poor anymore" and overcoming the cycle of failure. Rachel also wanted a future that positioned her to be considered middle class because she could readily afford the nice car and house.

Learning to Cope

As Rachel grew and matured, she acknowledged that everyone has the power to choose to latch onto opportunities to break a cycle of destitution, poverty, and other hardships. It does come down to courage and a sense of worth to embrace a path that is strange to families like hers. Despite the helplessness and the harshness of her experiences, she remained steady, worked hard on becoming proficient in school, and accepted gratefully the support of others. Rachel acknowledged that "I was closer to my mom, so she kind of helped steer me away from any criminal activity, even though we were in that situation and she could've made better choices." Rachel took the path leading out of her plight, but her older brother became a victim to hopelessness.

Rachel refused to follow the cycle that gripped her family. Her faith soared when her path became filled with people such as her pastor, his wife who nurtured her, and all the other positive influences. There were times when her mother with limited education demonstrated that she wanted more for her and from her. Rachel saw her often reading a book. She chastised Rachel for failing to live up to her abilities. She encouraged Rachel to work harder and do better in her studies. Rachel felt guilty.

Throughout those rough years, Rachel learned to survive by tapping into the positives and leaning on the few who cared enough to follow the pattern of her mother: chastising and inspiring her at the same time to become an achiever. Rachel heard their voices, and she was determined to give herself room to grow and dream. As she adapted, Rachel's dream became larger, and she settled into observing her pastor's home environment. It was different on so many levels. Consider what stayed with her:

> Another young lady was staying there . . . she was in the 11th grade and I was in 10 grade. . . . She was going through the college phase, SATs. . . . I never saw that before, to witness the college thing and see that this is part of life.

The surrogate parents, Rachel's pastor and his wife, had enabled Rachel to expand her mind and see a different way to live. They introduced "how to accomplish" strategies and then committed themselves to teaching Rachel simple rules of life that would serve her well in the future. For example, they used school to teach her discipline and then helped her within the home to maintain a vision of seeing herself academically sound by setting goals, achieving them, and moving forward to conquer the next task. For Rachel, it was to become a student in college. When she realized that she was experiencing normal things and that this was a normal life, her desire to have it deepened.

To show that she had been serious about adapting and thriving, Rachel recalled an emotional upheaval around the time of her senior year in high school:

> Many of my friends just dropped out and I just didn't understand it because here we are four months from graduation, you've been in school your whole life and now you're going to leave cause you can't take it anymore. . . . I think it's the dumbest thing to do because you have the rest of your life to live.

Rachel constantly reminded herself that she didn't want to fail. She wanted no part of failure. She didn't want it attached to her name in any way. Mistakes brought displeasure because she had a fear of falling back into the shelter life. When she was living with her mother, she would go to school and watch the smart students. Then she would duplicate their achieving behavior. The evidence of her early motivation was explained in this fashion:

> They seemed like they studied a lot, so as soon as I got in, my mom would make fun of me because I would be like I got to do my homework mom, I can't talk. I would do my homework and whatever I would learn I would read it to my mom. I kind of just pushed myself.

Resilience and Successes

Today, one thing Rachel has never forgotten is the source of all her success: She gives all credit to God. She recognizes that even her resilience came with her village of people. She believes that by herself she had no means to do anything, but with the cast of supporters, she flourished. At last, Rachel measured success succinctly:

> I'm helping myself now. I'm not going back to the shelters and when I finish my schooling, I want my bachelor's degree and when I purchase a house or when I can rent my own and I can afford it and a car. . . . Even though my mom was able to find an apartment, we were never able to keep it and the car was nonexistent.

Rachel made it clear that she is willing to concede that when she can take care of herself, she will acknowledge that she may consider herself successful. However, she felt

that she has made great strides toward goals. She has a license to drive, and she loves driving. Currently, she is in college, the first one in her family to go. To wipe away some of the scars from her past, she insists that she must graduate. The experience of the shelters and the knowledge that she was homeless make her pause. She needs the emotional boost. She also said that if she ever got the opportunity to tell her story to other children of prisoners, she would ask them to consider finding Jesus and then hold on and stay in church. Although she led a complex, very difficult childhood, she found the way out and they can, too.

Rachel had simple words for researchers and educational practitioners: "We're people. . . . If you teach us what we really need to know, then it's on us whether we take it or not." Rachel believes in accepting responsibility for actions. She is a stickler for understanding the world from which she emerged. Through her lens of reality, she wanted all to know that the needs of children of prisoners are vast, and in high school those children could use support and a deeper understanding of what they are going through. If teachers can relate to what they are feeling and if they ask the right questions, they stand a better chance of helping those children.

Rachel had no other adults to reach out to her. She was on her own, although sometimes a friend with an incarcerated father was willing to talk with her about their shared situation. That made Rachel feel like she and the friend had something in common, and it gave both of them the freedom to talk candidly about their dreadful lives. The lessons are glaring. Rachel learned them well and has applied them to her life. She won't go back. Therefore, she must follow through and help others. She has the desire and the ambition. She wants to become a teacher but also have other sharpened skills to

be able to assist poor families who need so much. She thinks of the health-care and insurance problems her family experienced and knows that she must stay on course. Her biggest dream is to be available to help them. So she has targeted adult people or children who are at the bottom of society, who are in shelters as she was so many times.

Recently, her mother died and although Rachel is saddened, she understands that she must go forth and help others. There is not much that she can do for her alcoholic father, who has been released and shows no sign of cleaning up his life. However, she is optimistic about her own life. She likes how she turned out and wishes to be further ahead at this time. She remains hopeful and holds on to her faith to aid her in all that she must accomplish.

Alice: I Just Want to Do It All

Introduction

Alice is almost 21 years old, and she still resides in the state of her birth. She is an active college student who continues to be surprised by her enormous appetite for success. She is a dreamer and lives at home with her mother and younger brother. Alice has an older half-brother who occasionally comes around to see the family. Moreover, she has a father who has spent the last 17 years in and out of prison.

Alice's father lived with them before his arrest and imprisonment. She was only 4 years old when he actually disappeared. Her parents were married, but she has no idea how many times the police officers arrested her father over those long years. As she explained:

> For the first couple of times I was so excited to see my father. After a while I noticed that he was going in and out of prison, so whenever he got out I enjoyed the time I

had left with him because I knew that it wasn't long before he was going to go right back in, sad to say.

His arrests were so frequent that Alice cannot recall how old she was during any of the "out" periods. Today, Alice uses her father's weakness as a strong motivator to live her life without the desire to engage in criminal behavior. She openly admits that her father's situation is an "eye-opener" for her. She cannot imagine allowing one mistake to take over one's life such that it can lead to that life spiraling out of control. Bluntly, she said emphatically, "That is not what I want to be or where I want to be in life. So instead of dwelling on the outcome of my father's ways, I used it as a tool to press on and keep going."

When she thought about what would lessen the impact of parental incarceration for her and others, she concluded that it must begin with the criminal parent. The felon must take responsibility. Voicing her opinion with strong overtones, she said, "Only you can change you, no one else." It always comes down to choice. It is good to have supporters but, in the end, one must choice a path. Her father made his choice.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

The challenges in this small family unit were many. Alice's mother was left to pick up the pieces of her life after several arrests and imprisonments of Alice's father. It was a hard life becoming a single parent, with two young children to raise by herself. In fact, it didn't help that 3 years had passed and her only daughter still hung on to the image of a perfect father. The time had come to have that dreaded talk with Alice. Alice was 7 or 8 when the talk happened and the whereabouts of a husband and a father were revealed without malice. He was behind bars for drugs.

Alice had already felt the undercurrent of tension in her home concerning her father's absence. She knew that time had passed and the hardships seemed to be connected to her father leaving his family behind. As much as she was perplexed about this intelligent man's behavior, she held on to her view of him, and that made him in her mind innocent and misunderstood. She had a childlike trust in her father, and even when she was told that her father couldn't stay out of jail, that it was a revolving door for him, she wouldn't allow herself to think badly of him. She refused to hold any kind of resentment against him. She remained loyal and actually believed that "he can do no wrong," even after seeing the effects of a troubled home:

> All I thought about was, well that's my daddy and seeing how my mother struggled was the worst thing to me. Knowing that she had to go back to school, knowing that she went nights without eating because she wanted to make sure her kids ate. She wanted to make sure we stayed in private school. At first I didn't get it but as I grew up I realized that it was hard just being a single mother.

Alice lived with hurt because she couldn't understand why her status as her father's daughter had little or no effect upon curbing his law-breaking behavior. As she grew, she refocused on her home life and tried to be an ideal daughter to her mother by assisting her in the daily care of her brother, 4 years her junior. By age 12, Alice felt that she had to learn how to cook so that she could feed herself and her brother. She was the parent at night. Her mother left her in charge of her brother and by doing so, pushed Alice to grow up too fast.

By trying so hard to be the best daughter for her, to relieve some of the pressure of her mother, Alice fell into a pattern of pretending and making up a life so that she could function during those later childhood years. She had also made a pledge to herself

to do everything in her power to help her younger brother not to grow up in the "same footsteps" as their father. In her choice to survive the shame of her father, she had to

> kind of grow up; I had to tell myself, his favorite basketball team was the Chicago Bulls. I used to tell myself when he was away that he was playing with the basketball team or going out of town to see them. Anything to tell myself that what my mother was saying about him being incarcerated or him not really providing for us wasn't true. Just anything to get myself out of this place, I would do it.

As much as Alice lived with the knowledge of the struggle within her home to survive, she still preferred not to acknowledge the reality of her world. She loved her father, and she knew that he would always be her father. She was a part of this world because of him; she was grateful. However, she had to admit that she didn't trust him. Somewhere in her mind, she knew that he was unstable and she couldn't trust him with their money or precious lives. Yet she credited the delusional path for keeping her going even after she overheard conversations:

> I would hear my mother taking about us on the phone. I used to always go on the balcony and tell myself, no, it's not like that. This is how your life is, your dad plays for Chicago Bulls and your mom, she's this big-time person in government and you have a great life, you have a great family.

Alice walked through life at times blinded by her love for her father that skewed her view of the world. She developed a pattern of behavior. She took calls from her father and accepted his counsel. Her behavior led her to make other decisions that were disastrous. Unfortunately, she saw everyone as good, and this way of thinking was connected to her feelings about her father. Her nonacceptance of her real situation caused unnecessary mishaps in her life. Getting involved with a boy because he had a big house, a car, and two parents was ill-advised because his father turned out to be like her father: a man who was involved with drugs. She watched this man be deported to his country for

his supposed crimes. However, she wouldn't leave this man's son. She saw the relationship as perfect and has not gotten over it, even today.

The danger for her was that she believed that she needed that boy and others just like him. She never saw the truth about them. Alice wanted somebody to call her own whom she could admire. Her current boyfriend, although he seems to be a fine young man, has a father who is behind bars for possession of drugs. In fact, she goes after boys who are living her life. She makes excuses that their fathers are not as bad as hers. Yet, she declared with regret that none could possibly understand her hurt because the bad stuff happened only once to them, but "constantly" to her. It is no surprise that most of her friends are boys and that few girls ever get close to her.

Alice might not have been prepared to resent her father, but she had trouble dealing with home. She not only felt a deep sense of shame, she was envious over what she perceived she was missing—things that were normal in other girls' lives. Making no attempt to have female friends, at one point in her life, it dwarfed her normal development and socially isolated her. She described her home arrangements:

> I moved three times and when I actually got to a stable place, I was unhappy. . . . The environment that I was in. . . . my mother could only afford so much being on her own . . . because she was by herself, we actually lived in a two-bedroom apartment and at first it was fine, just me and my younger brother. My mom, she had a room to herself. Then, the railings on the bed used to break and she wouldn't have money and she would put books under it and then, me, and my younger brother's bed broke, so my uncle wound up giving us his bunk bed. When the top wasn't stable enough, we both had to sleep in the same bed and this happened until I was 17. So as I grew up, it really hurt me, because I felt I was ashamed to invite people over. I really couldn't have friends, because I was so ashamed.

During those years, Alice silently suffered through the humiliating thought of going to college without experiencing having her own room. Later, when she entered college, she would look back on her moments of despair over this. After Alice's high-

school graduation, her mother was able to rent her first house, and Alice got her own room, even if it was just for a few months. Then, she was off to college but enjoyed returning home to sleep in her own room during breaks. She said,

> It was me in that room and until this day, I'm going on 21 years old, I can't share a room never again. I need to have my own room and my mom, she's like saying, 'I'm thinking about adopting a child.' I'm like no! because I want my own room.

Alice missed the presence of her father and recognized that she was misguided by her emotional attachment to him. During those short periods when he was released back into the community, she would see him. She considered that she had an open relationship with him. She would tell him confidential things, and he would not tell her mother. Alice placed emphasis not on his potentiality for breaking the law but on the honesty between them. She cared very little about his criminal actions because she felt "everybody can turn their life around if they really want to." At that time in her life, she had no intention of becoming his judge. However, even with her childlike admiration and her belief that if he "could move mountains for me, he would," she would see the situation between them implode because he was a drug user. She simply recalled an incident:

> Once my mom had to go to work early and I was probably in the fifth or sixth grade. I had to be in charge of getting my brother ready for school. . . . My aunt was supposed to pick us up and take us to school. She was a teacher at the school. My mom had always said "don't open the door for your father and if he comes to the house do not ever open the door." He just happened to come to the house that day and we were so excited to see him, just so excited, we opened the door anyway and he stayed in the house. He talked to us for a while until my aunt called the house phone and our father said "just go ahead, I will lock the door and I'll walk out behind you" and I said okay, no big deal and we went about our way. My mom just happened to come home early that day and the couch was gone, the TV was gone, my brother's bike was gone and two piggy banks were gone. When we got home, she asked, Did your father come? Yeah!

Alice remembered how upset her aunt was because Alice had said nothing to her in the car to school. She sat in silence. Questions were hurled at Alice because she was

older. What was crystal clear by the door being unlocked was that her father had not finished robbing them. Alice saw such hurt on her mother's face, yet she didn't lash out at her or her brother. Instead, she quietly lamented to her sister that her children couldn't be blamed because the thief was their father and they just didn't understand the stress that she was under due to him. They were children. However, Alice was shaken by the sight of her crushed mother because she had no money to replace the goods stolen. Today, Alice wishes that she had listened and obeyed her mother, but admits that the denial about her father was so deeply engrained in her mind that she was a slave to him of her own making and "all the time it was Daddy can really do no wrong."

Primary-Care Provider

For years, Alice's mother struggled to better herself so that she could better provide for her two children. Unfortunately, her decision of working and going to school left her turning over some of the parenting of her son to her daughter. This was not a good thing, but she trusted Alice to not let her down, and she didn't. But Alice did not understand her real-life situation from the perspective of her mother. She was a child herself. Her mother was tired all the time because she worked very hard at her government job. Alice saw her struggle and tried to help her in any way possible to ease her burdens. She admitted, "I was the oldest in the house; everything fell on me."

There were difficult periods that stood out in Alice's mind. Hearing her mother say to friends, "I would go out with you, but I have to watch my children," made Alice always want to do more for her. Her mother's friends were married people with husbands at home. They were making more money than her mother, yet they were the women her mother wanted to be around. So Alice would have to change her plans to remain home to

watch her brother because her mother felt that she needed to be free of her personal burdens by going out and having some adult time. Alice realized that her mother was trying not to be the outcast by continually saying that she couldn't afford to go out. But, those friends never looked at her that way; it was just her perception.

However, during her childhood years, Alice found family life extremely difficult at unexpected times. She recalled the day her mother asked her recently released father for a favor. The day evolved into a dramatic eventful experience for Alice and her younger brother, who were in his temporary care. Alice's mother felt that she had no other option because she was hospitalized. He was only supposed to get his children something to eat, but the day turned into a crisis. He drove them to a strange neighborhood and left them unattended in his car for a long time. They sat and waited for him for hours.

Meanwhile at the hospital, Alice's mother had called the police. When the police would not respond, she checked herself out of the hospital and went to find her children. That day Alice saw her drug felon father arrested for the first and only time. It was traumatic but left her admitting to herself that the time had come to "stop living in the world that everything was okay." It wasn't, and she had to also admit that "he's a bad person that I should not trust, who I should not put all my love into because he will hurt me." Alice learned later that she could withstand the shock. Alice acknowledged:

> At first I really didn't get it. She was telling me how she felt about the situation when I got of age and that's when I knew it. . . . Whatever I wanted to be in life, the first person I would lay my hat down to is my mother.

This was a first of many talks between them. Somehow, Alice began to move toward reality in a concrete way. She adjusted her thinking completely and was open to

the lessons she would learn from her mother about perseverance. Alice realized that she had a good mother, a caring mother, a mother who would continue to sacrifice for her. Yes, they would have their differences, but they would make it as a family. More to the point, Alice felt the spark within to achieve for her mother. She wanted to make up for the pain and suffering over the years as her mother, by herself, slowly climbed out of poverty.

School Life

Alice's school life was complex, but she made it through successfully and graduated, filled with great expectations for her future. But those 4 years were eventful and helped to steer her toward self-inventory of who she really was as a human being.

Alice had her challenges in high school. She went to a predominantly White private school. Most of her friends in the school were children of privilege. She was out of place but had been placed there by her mother. Her mother was determined to give her a fighting chance by introducing her to the richness of a well-rounded education. But her mother only came for teacher conferences or to see her in some school activities. She didn't know what Alice was going through in the social world of school on a daily basis. Those children were not experiencing the hardship of being separated from one or both parents due to incarceration. They were rich, spoiled, and doing drugs in bathrooms and classes. Although she never conceived of doing drugs, she felt like a criminal because she was surrounded by criminal activity.

Alice never told her peers about her father being in prison. But one day, she shared her secret with one of her best friends. She was a sweet girl and so Alice felt comfortable enough to impart some details. She thought that she knew this friend well.

She told her that her father was on drugs and that he was in and out of prison often. Alice's friend understood her plight. However, Alice discovered much later that the reason why her friend was so eager to explain the behavior of her father—emphasizing that he couldn't help himself and he was a good man with a weakness that deserved her compassion—was because she was secretly dabbling in drugs. Today, Alice realizes that her friend was giving her a drug addict's perspective. Alice is glad that her friend is in a rehabilitation center for some much-needed help.

Alice's high-school days went by quickly. She thought that her friend was the only person who knew about her father. But, she soon realized that teachers figured out that her story was different and this raised enough interest about her for them to be curious. Some teachers figured it out,

> considering the income was only coming from my mother. She paid the bills, she showed up whenever something was wrong with my grades. She was the only one there, there, there. Everybody thinks the worst especially being a White school . . . he's dead, he's in jail, and he's a deadbeat.

But Alice had advocates in her school who moved beyond curiosity; they reached out to help her move forward and grow into a fine adult achiever. They were her biology and English teachers, who happened to be Black. They approached her in a way that encouraged Alice to open up and tell them everything about her father being in and out of prison for most of her life. And yes, she lived with her mother. From that day, they took a special interest in her. The teachers made a commitment to help her advance successfully in school. They gave her their private telephone numbers and assisted Alice in understanding and doing homework well. Alice flourished under their care.

There were moments when things went awry for Alice. She recalled the times when she had to stay up late with her mother, who experienced back pain, or she was

prevented from sleeping because her younger brother's grief kept her up by wailing for their father. Those two teachers would come to her rescue the next day in school by seeking out the truth of what she was enduring at the time and coming up with remedies to get her through without failing one class. They were amazing, and Alice buckled down and gave her best self to that school. Some classmates believed it was favoritism, but Alice knew that those teachers were her salvation. They gave her more than academic guidance; they gave her a place of refuge from her home woes.

With the encouragement of her two Black teachers, Alice joined a group that got her into the National Black Caucus session, and she got to see how bills are made. The teachers continued to expose her to a wider world. She went to visit the White House and the Capitol. They took her on a field trip to Costa Rica and to Brazil because she had a high interest in science. They gave her an opportunity to explore her passion and to see how others live.

One of the best things that happened to Alice was involving her in extracurricular activity because it gave her new friends. This time she had patience, and she eliminated from her circle those who were not good for her. She still wanted her father to be a part of her life but talked to her mother faithfully and realized her needs were being fulfilled in the tender care of her best friend, her mother.

Finally, high school ended, graduation day came, and she was scared because she thought that it would be noticeable that her father was absent. She was still bothered by some of her friends' rich lifestyles. That day she observed others as they milled around, taking family pictures. She was jealous of the two-parent groups. She had only her mother, two brothers, and her maternal grandmother to immortalize in pictures. But later,

friends whom she had envied told her privately that their lives were worse or at least the same as hers. They knew disappointments, too. One of her friends told Alice that her brother didn't bother to attend her graduation. He was with his girlfriend, and she was heartbroken.

So although Alice longed for a father, she had collected over the years valued friends and two teachers who refused to give up on her or forget her. To this day, they watch over her from afar. They check on her progress, and Alice is appreciative of their support.

Learning to Cope

Alice walked through life blinded by her love for her father. Her view of him prevented her from accepting her reality. She acknowledged why she had to continue her way of thinking: "I just took myself out of the world I was in just in order to make sure I stayed sane." Nonetheless, she developed a pattern of behavior that impacted her negatively. Alice accepted collect calls from her father and took his counsel. Her perception of her father, which didn't include accepting the truth about him, led her to make poor decisions for a time with a young man. Unfortunately, she saw everyone as good. An example of this was her relationship with a boyfriend:

> My boyfriend had a completely different life from how I was. He was just wonderful to me. I lived in an apartment; he lived in a big house. He had two parents but his father wound up getting deported because of a drug incident. He helped me because he could relate.

Alice wasn't coping well at that time. She still held on to her make-believe world. Becoming involved with a boy because he had a big house and two parents was ill-advised. The boyfriend's father turned out to be like her father. He had the same

weakness, being lost to drugs. She refused to see things as they were, and so she continued her relationship with that boy. The danger to her was that she believed that she needed him and others like him to cope. She just wanted somebody to call her own whom she could admire. But she fell in a fictional trap because she continued to be drawn to boys who were living her same kind of life. They all had fathers who were involved with drugs. She lamented over the fact that they were spared because their fathers' imprisonment happened only once, whereas it happened to her "constantly."

The adapting for Alice came slowly. She explained that:

> I have been dancing since I was 2 and I am almost 21. Whenever I had a problem, dancing was the one thing that took me away from everything. I would be so stressed. If I didn't have that, I would be more of a sad person.

However, Alice began to face the truth about her life. She moved beyond feeling sorry for herself and allowed friends to help her rise above the daunting reality. Her friends used social activities as a balm. While they had her attention, they told her that their lives were worse or at least the same as hers. This became evident through her eventual acceptance of a flawed father; she could claim that, indeed, she learned to cope.

Resilience and Successes

Currently, Alice is attending a university in New York and she is majoring in biology and pre-med. She celebrates her resiliency and looks forward to medical school. She now conducts all phases of her life in a way that pleases her mother. She considers her mother and God as the main contributors to the success that she has enjoyed. When her mother realized that Alice was serious about becoming a doctor, she enrolled herself in school to obtain a master's degree so that she will be financially able to assist Alice in fulfilling her dream. About her mother, Alice said,

> You love me that much . . . she is really an inspiration. I don't feel like I am worthy. . . . I mean it makes me feel good to know that I have a mother that will go above and beyond to make sure that I stay on the right track.

Alice has kept her tradition from her high-school days of doing something special on her mother's birthday. She could never make up for her mother's sacrifice, but she can show that she is aware of it. She now uses her father's absence due to imprisonment as her reason for the continued positive progress. She no longer dwells on what she cannot change. When she considers how far she has come—from the girl who barely made it out of junior high school to the girl who has broaden her horizons by traveling abroad, to the girl who earned a place in college preparatory school—she consistently says aloud, "I made it."

Because Alice stayed so long in a fog of denial, she wants to do it all now. She recognizes her own strengths, and she is humbled and feels blessed that she can do anything that she can dream. At present, she is once again listening to her own voice and the voice of her mother. She has discovered that she has her father's talent for business ventures. Before his involvement with drugs, he was quite successful in his own endeavors. She is leaning toward opening up a restaurant called Heavenly Delicious. The trademark is hers, and the idea will be put to the test in the real world.

Today, she stands erect on her strengths: her patience, trust in people, leadership ability, intelligence, passion, and forgiving nature. Her maturity has allowed her to understand other people's weaknesses, especially those of people close to her. She is not bitter; her outlook on life is positive. She actually mused over what she would say to a group of children of prisoners who struggle with the impact of incarceration. She readily said:

> Whichever parent is incarcerated, don't hate them . . . it is not your fault. . . . Don't think that you could have prevented it because it is nobody's fault. . . . Everybody chooses their own way of life. . . . Do not think that you need to be a certain way because of someone else's mistakes. . . . That should be your reason for pressing on.

Alice paused to acknowledge that she likes how she has turned out, even with the regrets. Everyone has them in life. She confessed that she doesn't have "One Big" regret. She actually is pleased at the way her life unfolded:

> I even like that my father helped me become the person I am because of his own situation. My father never saw a C in his life. He went to high school. He didn't go to college. He had a government job. He and my mother moved in together. He was stable and to see him go down like that impacted my life and he tells me all the time, Be mindful of who you hang around and what you do because you determine your destiny. Do not try anything one time because drugs are addicting and I would never want my child to go through what I went through. I will tell you as much as I can, I will never put you in danger.

Alice believes that her father is now sincere and would never place her in dangerous situations. She acknowledged that he is not her hero and her eyes are wide open. Her mother has that honor. But, she has learned not to go back in those dark places; her younger brother has not moved from such a place. He has been impacted, and it causes her much anxiety. She wondered if being a boy has something to do with his stagnation. She has made him her priority. She will not give up on saving him from himself. She had supporters, and she will be his bridge to the bright side. She is determined and needs male relatives to step in and become surrogate fathers. It is time, she believes, to have someone take her father's place because "at the end of the day, everybody needs a father," according to her.

In an ideal world, she knows that her father would come and save his son, but that most likely will never happen. She understands the dependency on parents. But Alice knows for herself the time has come to grow up and go out and find her way in the world

without her mother guiding every step of the way. She is motivated and uses her confidence and success system to move forward with hope.

Alice learned some lessons from all of her experiences and willingly shared them:

> Never depend on anybody like I depend on my mother. Even college years, I planned to move into an apartment with my three friends. Two friends didn't have the grades to get into the apartment and that was such a disappointment to me. I depended on them. I'm serious, don't backslide even when things get really hard and if you have to second-guess yourself about it, don't do it, just go ahead and do what you are supposed to do right then and there.

Alice ended her wise counsel by adding research scholars and others who have a stake in the lives of children to her list of people who should hear her voice. She clearly wanted them to know that

> you can never understand what a child is going through unless you speak to the child. You cannot speak to their parents; you cannot speak to their friends because everybody reacts differently. Everything in life ties together. . . . One parent might be incarcerated but people have no idea how much that one thing can affect your entire life. It's not a small situation. It is the norm to have single family homes. . . . Don't think that because it is so common, it's natural; it is not, it is sad.

Alice is one young woman among many who have experienced parental incarceration. In her small family of two siblings, she spent her early years coping with the loss of her father by giving him the identity that she could live with in her daily life. In later childhood, she awakened and learned to manage the truth and found that she was indeed resilient. But, she has a young brother who hasn't been so lucky. His reaction was so different from hers, and thus she makes her point.

Joel: I Don't Value Money as Success

Introduction

Joel is a young man of 20 who resides in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern region of the United States. Currently he is a college student who has set his sights on

becoming an FBI agent. He admits that this dream is ambitious, especially since all his life people told him that he wasn't smart enough. He is about to prove them wrong by sticking to his plan to achieve great things.

Joel has a father who has been in prison all of Joel's life. Joel's birth was marred by his father's absence. Although his parents were married, Joel lived with only one of his seven siblings. Joel struggled throughout his childhood with the knowledge that he had a habitual criminal for a father. As a college student, he had the added stress of dealing with the release of his father into the community. He believes that the time has come for his father to shoulder the responsibility for his actions, "to grow up and be a man." Joel remains harsh with his criticism and proclaimed his father a "screw up, a guy that keeps redoing things in his life that he is too old for."

As strongly as Joel feels about his father's behavior, he still wishes that his childhood was filled with the presence of his father, and he has memories of a supportive, nurturing person who loved him. He considers himself a moral person, and that is why he is comfortable believing that he would not exhibit criminal behavior. He has suffered directly from his father's lifestyle. Joel feels that the impact of parental incarceration could be lessened by people being actively engaged in honest work. Therefore, he sees more available jobs as the key to good citizenship.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

The challenge for Joel's mother was when to tell Joel the uncomfortable news about his father. Joel couldn't quite remember the exact age of his enlightenment, but he recalled that it was between 5 and 8 years of age when his mother and other family members just simply said that his father was locked up. From that defining moment when

he had to confront such an issue as prison, Joel decided to just shut down and keep people out of his life from then on. He was a boy child who believed that he had a really bad father. One fact that he was certain of was that prison was a bad place to be.

When he was a small boy, he saw his father once or twice in his home, but he didn't run after him or actively try to build a relationship with him. Although Joel was a child, he knew not to trust his father because he was unworthy. Joel had problems relating to bonding with him. Joel shared his secret with a friend who lived next door to him. Together they engaged in outdoor activities to forget Joel's "whole situation." Those were the times when Joel felt "free." His male friend understood because in their group of friends, there were others who were experiencing the impact of parental incarceration. Joel explained to his friend that what was so troubling was that his father couldn't stay out of prison. He was either "locked up or getting ready to go back." Yet Joel longed for "more love from him and just being able to have a father to do things with."

Primary-Care Provider

Joel was cared for by his mother. He had a history of asthma that kept him home from time to time. According to him, she was a great mother. She supported him and propped him up because he found life painful sometimes and she knew it. Joel's mother couldn't quite fix everything that was wrong with his life, but the things that she could, she did with gusto. She was a force when her child was being ostracized and stripped of his self-esteem. Today she encourages Joel to return to the schools he attended to inspire other students and seek out those teachers who hurt him deeply by their unkind, demeaning words. Joel says that his mother will not let this idea go. He constantly hears her saying "You got to go back." He knows someday, he will.

As Joel developed and grew taller and older, he realized that people gossiped in his neighborhood. He was living in a White town, and there were problems of hostility. Joel found it difficult to live in a hostile environment. He felt helpless and that he really needed his father. During those years, Joel was aware of the concerns of his mother. She was spending a portion of her days worrying about him. By the time he entered high school, she practically lived there, meeting with the teachers who openly wrote off her son. Joel was grateful that he had an advocate in his mother. He was also grateful that he grew up in a home where morals were taught and valued. His mother did her best to parent him, but there were some things that she could not teach him, and he wouldn't talk to her about. He was a boy, and he felt that he should have boy talks with a man, such as his father.

School Life

Joel started elementary school early. He was young and shy and didn't like to talk, so he wouldn't, but his silence was misunderstood. He was placed in special education. Joel was smart, but couldn't get out of the track he was compelled to follow. It didn't matter to the teachers that he excelled. As he moved through the system and years went by, he recounted what people always told him:

> I wasn't smart at all. I was the dumbest one. Teachers would tell me you're never going to do anything in your life that's worth anything. But, my inspiration is when people tell me I can't do something; it is the fuel. It happened all throughout high school and in middle school, I was in special ed. for some classes for no reason and I did really good in them but they just wanted to keep me in there. One of the teachers told me because I was always out with asthma, You'll never make it through nothing, and that's when they started but, I passed all my classes and I came out of special ed.

Joel gave no explanation for why he never told his teachers about his father. But he emphatically said that the teachers in his high school had little concern for his well-

being. His presence most times was not acknowledged, and when it was, it was to put him down. Joel had two brothers who passed through that high school. They were not very successful; actually they were two angry Black boys. This was a White school, and when Joel arrived later to thrive academically, it was made clear that he had been pigeon-holed and judged by what each teacher knew about his two brothers.

Joel felt that his academic world was against him. He thought that maybe the teachers did know about his career-criminal father. The impression his brothers made was so bad that Joel mused, "I guess they were more angry. I don't know their story. They kept it to themselves." Joel felt that if others also knew about his father's lifestyle, he stood no chance in changing their minds. Joel admits that he was a social pariah. He was considered an undesirable student. No one wanted to be bothered with him, so once again, he was placed in special education. It became contentious at home and at school when his mother found out. Joel shed some light on this matter:

> Another teacher told me, I definitely don't see you doing anything with your life. I said okay, watch me. I told my mom what she said. My mom went down and talked to her and she was nice to me. I don't know what happened but anytime I asked to go to the nurse, she would just let me go.

However, eventually, Joel's mother pulled him from his designated school and sent him a distance to another district to finish high school. Recalling that timely move, he said, "Thank God for it." He heard later that his old high school, which prided itself of being one of the top 10 high schools in his region for academic prowess, had fallen victim to drugs.

Joel entered his new school with hope and the hidden assurance that he had the intelligence to finish. At the very beginning, the signs were in his favor. The school staff couldn't find the special education transfer papers. They believed that they never

received them, so Joel was placed in regular classes. Joel held his own throughout his time there and graduated with a required Regents Diploma. He was told only the day before that he had qualified to be robed. The reason for the delay was that he had had some trouble with one teacher who was really pushing him to realize his potential. So one day, although he felt sick, he participated in a track meet, in spite of great pain. He ran his fastest times, but the next day he was hospitalized with walking pneumonia.

This resulted in his missing the last 2 months of school. He had to teach himself all the material for two classes and then, somehow, take the final examination. Joel strongly believes today that the reason he passed all of his classes was "God, definitely God." When Joel looks back at those days, he is reminded how much he owes to God because he feels that he couldn't have the strength by himself to withstand the cruelty placed upon him in those early high-school days. He recalled one incident in which a classmate rammed a desk in his back. He endured such treatment because he wanted to get through school and to prove every teacher wrong. His classmates who didn't support him, he also wanted to inspire.

Learning to Cope

Joel discovered that writing poetry helped to relieve some of the pressure of life. He welcomed the relief of expressing his feelings on paper. Even today, when he feels the strain of unexpected events, Joel still goes someplace and writes.

At some point during Joel's high-school years, he found an anchor stronger than himself. He found that a spiritual life was just what he needed, and he embraced church life with an acceptance of and thankfulness for finally finding a way to focus on what he must do. He said, "Whenever I found things to be wrong, I would just stay away from it,

and I would say that my whole decision-making is if it's not going to help me or benefit me, I'd rather stay away."

Although Joel was never traumatized by seeing his father arrested, he admitted to struggles that he had to overcome. For example, during his first and second year of college, he found the academic challenges overwhelming. The accounting work was extremely hard for him, but he wouldn't quit trying to learn and to get through with passing grades. But the attitudes of two of his teachers toward him conveyed to Joel a negative message that he was not smart enough to earn passing grades in their classes. One teacher knew that Joel was quite knowledgeable about his course material; the other teacher, according to Joel, "automatically just kicked me out of class." Joel pondered over those words: "Two teachers told me, 'I see you're not going to make it through my class, I'll set you up for next semester. You'll be able to be one of my star candidates because you know all the information.'"

Joel received financial aid that was predicated on his successfully passing his classes. He was distraught. To Joel, it seemed that everything came at once: the difficulty with classes and his part-time job. He needed the job assistance because he felt strongly about helping himself. Joel met the temporary challenges. He was determined to find a way out, and he did.

Therefore, Joel felt a sense of obligation to say to other children of prisoners that they shouldn't give up and they should follow paths that will lead to successful lives. He gladly shared what he would say to them: "I've been through some things; I'll tell part of my life. . . . I know that you can get past it because you're younger, you have time to heal. If I can do it, you can do it."

Currently, Joel relishes every moment that he spends with underprivileged children at no-cost summer camps. He doesn't miss a summer with the children. He works with 5- to 12-year-olds. If they need a listening ear, he offers his. He encourages them in every way. He wants those children to know that they have a friend in him. He has recognized that he loves children and is concerned about their well-being. He desires to serve them and to inspire them; therefore, he will not stop returning to those camps. Joel feels that he is needed at the summer camps because he has a story to share that can give the children hope for better futures.

Resilience and Successes

Despite the fact that Joel had so many people throughout his childhood years that negatively impacted him, he found ways to thrive. He used every negative word as motivation to strengthen his resilience to move forward. While the schoolteachers attacked his self-esteem and his worth as a young Black boy, he had champions at home who built him up every time that he was wounded. His mother was the force behind his survival; she would always push him forward. His sister took the time to listen to him, and she remains invested in him today. Other family members lent support and even random strangers reached out with positive actions toward him.

When Joel mused about how far he has traveled from those early childhood years, he was reminded of his promise to himself about parenthood:

> I told myself if I ever have kids, I wouldn't mess up my life, so that it's an ongoing cycle because I don't want my kids to ever grow up without their father. I know how it is and I don't want that to ever happen.

Joel's countenance changed when he talked about his accomplishments. At the top of his accomplishment list he cited his love for serving others. Then he described his

successful path through high-school graduation, and other things that he experienced that brought him great satisfaction:

> I had the chance to go for law enforcement . . . go to Youth Police Academy and I loved it. I graduated from that and joined the fire department as a youth. I get to help kids every summer. . . . I'm getting ready to take the NYPD test.

As Joel continues to knock down barricades, he moves deliberately forward. He views law enforcement as his life's work. He is encouraged because he believes he sees life unfolding for him in a positive way. He doesn't measure his success or any success by money earned. He said, "You can have money and not be successful; a trust fund." But loving life and being committed to "the things that you want to do, the life that you live" are much more important.

Joel recognizes that he brought into his manhood a desire to not be hasty about situations because of his experiences having an incarcerated father and being hurt by teachers writing him off. He is open to trying "to see what's good" in a situation because he doesn't feel that he can go through life successfully only seeing the "wrong in everything." He uses his father as an example. Joel thinks that if his mother needed his father, now that he is out of prison, his father would actually try to help her.

Furthermore, Joel wants to hold on to an optimistic view of life as he addresses his own. If he had an opportunity to encourage other children like himself by using his story at high schools, he would without hesitation speak frankly these words:

> You can do anything in your life. It's your life, you got to live it. Always have love for your parents . . . about the imprisoned parent. . . . It might be hard at this time right now but still keeping pushing on. . . . Whenever they get out . . . work things out . . . even though they're not there, doesn't mean that they don't love you.

Joel realizes also that he has benefited from his unique childhood experiences and learned lessons that will continue to support him. He understands now that some people

judge others and those same ones never take time to know the person in question. Joel learned that because people wrote him off, it didn't mean that he should take their opinion of him and use it as an excuse to fail. Thankfully, he didn't, and he is looking forward to someday showing those adults his police badge.

Presently, he sees himself as a "struggling young man." Yet Joel also sees himself successfully reaching his goals in life. He trusts God as his hero because he "can talk to Him about anything." He is "happy" and "joyful" with how he has turned out. He recognizes that he is a "young powerful man of God with a mind to do anything in life that I want." So he celebrates what he does have, and that seems to include several people who have contributed to his successful journey. Because of them, he knows what it means to be a man, to look after his responsibilities and be a gentleman always.

Joel finds solace in the advice he gave to research scholars and educational practitioners about how they should view children of prisoners:

> The life that we live . . . help them . . . words can make somebody shut down . . . I listen . . . I know how it is to shut down . . . shutting people out . . . make sure that it is comfortable . . . go in there with a willing mind to listen, especially if they're not educated . . . just slow it down . . . be real with the person.

The thought of having professional people simply listen to the voices of children who have experienced the impact of an incarcerated parent affected Joel in a positive way. Joel thought about the people whom he admires and considered how much of a part they played in catapulting him forward. Whether they were the listeners or the people who refused to listen, they all played a part in motivating him, and he is grateful.

Tilda: Talking to Someone Brings Healing

Introduction

Tilda has had more than her share of trauma in her 21 years. She resides in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. She brings a special kind of courage as she challenges the silence surrounding parental incarceration. Her father was locked away in a prison when she was just a baby. Their off-and-on separation lasted many years. Her father entered the prison system more than three times, totaling 7 years. When Tilda was 14, her father was released into the community and has remained on the outside. At the time of his return to the family, Tilda felt a surge of happiness; she felt at peace; she was filled with excitement and allowed herself to be hopeful for his behavior adjustment.

Tilda's parents were never married, and they didn't live together prior to his arrest and incarceration. Tilda never lived with her father. Nor has Tilda ever lived with her four sisters and two brothers. At present, she is awaiting entry into county college. She has been accepted and will study early-childhood education. In the meantime, she works as a hair salon assistant to supplement her financial aid.

When Tilda pondered over why she never considered breaking the law, she said simply, "because of the love and support that was behind me." With the breakdown of secure attachment to her father, she felt strongly about the impact of incarceration being lessened if relatives, peers, and/or friends would be supportive to the children left behind, especially girls. Tilda said that "there is an emptiness that girls feel when their dad's away, and sometimes it can lead to looking for love in the wrong places."

Navigating Family and Social Challenges

At 18 years old, Tilda's mother, a senior-high-school female student, found her dreams dashed away because she was pregnant. Although she would graduate from high school, she would never recover from having Tilda. This young woman's goal to attend college was never realized and from the very beginning of motherhood, she resented her child. She was attached to a young man who engaged in criminal activities and who would be in jail by the time Tilda arrived. This was the world into which Tilda entered and had to endure.

Tilda's young mother was pushed into adulthood without prospects for the future. She had to become a responsible parent to her baby. She was disgruntled, and grouchily went to work. By Tilda's second or third birthday, her mother, despondent by her own life choices and frustrated by babysitter problems, traveled the short 10-minute distance to her parents' house and left her toddler. Tilda's mother never became the custodial parent again. Tilda had a mother who really didn't want her. Before Tilda would turn 15, her mother would tell her this during a terrible scene, and it would almost destroy her.

Indeed, Tilda would face several challenges as a child. She actually couldn't describe how the abandonment reality affected every facet of her life. Tilda said about her life, "I cannot even describe it to you what that felt like going to bed by yourself. No one reading you stories; no one tucking you in. All those things mattered when I was younger."

Another challenge Tilda had to face was her grandparents' silence, in all those ensuing years never speaking to her about her status in their home. Life just drifted for her. The silence deeply affected this impressionable child, and so she turned inward and

suffered as she longed for a father to love and care for her. It wasn't until she was 5 and had entered kindergarten that she was told that her father was actually in prison. She always believed that he was just away.

Tilda's grandparents adopted her and brought her up as an only child. But they never told Tilda about their loving act. They never explained anything to her concerning the matters of her well-being. Instead, they continued to provide for Tilda without saying a word of assurance to their granddaughter that indeed she had a stable home of her own. It would be years later in Tilda's childhood that she would discover what they had done. In the meantime, life continued without much conversation about family matters. Tilda seemed always confused and alone.

Tilda's mother would disappear from her life for long periods and then just pop up and play mother. For example, she would try to buy her daughter's affections by habitually appearing with a handful of gifts for Tilda. But Tilda longed for an emotional connection with her, and when it became evident that it would never happen, Tilda acted out and threw tantrums. She didn't care about her mother's excuses for not being a presence in her life. She didn't want to hear about her transportation issues on those few weekends that were supposed to be theirs. She wanted her mother to want to be with her and love her. But her mother would spend those precious moments with her merely explaining why she didn't mean to neglect Tilda. All her mother managed to do, however, was to convince Tilda that her deep hurt was justified.

The sporadic visits were so harmful and cruel to Tilda because she couldn't figure out her place in her mother's life. Although she remembered short visits, there were others at different residences that were longer and longer distances away; Tilda recalled

depressed feelings engulfing her because she felt in the way. She said, "It was hard. I was angry because I felt like at that time no one wanted me and I felt I was a burden especially on my grandparents. They didn't have kids, and no one lived with them."

In her younger years, Tilda would experience a harsh life. Her mother not only dragged her around to see siblings who had different mothers but would take her small 5-year-old daughter inside the prison to visit her father. Tilda was too young to understand why her father was in such a far place. She could never understand why her father couldn't leave with her or why she had a limited time with him. She was always perplexed, and she was always happy to see him. She described those visits in detail:

> When you go, you have to be checked; frisked. You couldn't wear certain clothing. If you wore certain clothing, you would be turned away and you would have to go all the way back home and come all the way back with new clothing and then you have to go into this big room where there are other inmates because of their attire. . . . Sometimes you have to sit there for him to come out and while you're talking with him, you can't hug too much or kiss too much because there is a guard that's watching. . . . Sometimes, there are other men around and they can be with their wives and you got to see them kissing all over and it just wasn't good. It wasn't a good scene.

Although Tilda had no idea how much she was affected by her experiences in the early years, she was astute enough later on to recognize emotions that troubled her. The simple activities such as visiting family members, going to school, performing in school plays, and engaging in other things in life that are normal made Tilda anxious because her father was behind bars, and he was unable to share those moments.

Tilda would have to face her father's bad decisions head-on because he had to be separated physically from her, returning to prison three times before she became a teenager. But Tilda didn't shut him out of her life. She had discovered through those prison visits and later, as she became older, through letters, that she was loved by her

father. He emotionally reached out to her and connected. He invested in her life, and she responded in kind. She needed him in her life. She needed love and acceptance. Her grandparents couldn't fill the void.

On one occasion when Tilda's father had been released from prison, she was able to visit him at his home, just after his two daughters were born. After that visit, he would come and get her on weekends. Tilda spent time with him and her half-sisters, but she would never know the joy of living with them. She has been drawn to her father, and the rest of Tilda's family chastised her for it. According to Tilda, it became an issue

> because of the strong attachment for some reason I had to my dad. I loved him unconditionally and I knew what he was doing, and I knew that it was wrong, but I still loved him and that was an issue. People didn't understand why I loved him so; why I wanted to be around him. They said, He don't even take care of you so why do you want to be with him? or I guess you love the ones that just really don't care about you. It affected me because that's not how I felt but I just felt like if I lost the love for him, I would lose him completely.

Tilda was still too young to comprehend the emotional undertones of her family and the complexities of their lives. Many of them were drug addicts and/or on welfare. She had not grasped fully her own feelings about most things happening to her. So how could she be expected to understand that her mother's abandonment could be the spark fueling her uncontrollable urge to keep close to her father? She had no close relationship with her mother for a myriad of reasons. But the main reason was the fact that her mother was mean. The atmosphere was always strained when Tilda's mother was around. Tilda tended to get into trouble "a lot for anything." But the reward for seeking out her father was a relationship and the feeling that someone cared for her. What was comforting to her was that her father had allowed her to see his softer, nurturing side, and she liked it.

Tilda's mother didn't even try to assure her child of her love. According to Tilda, "I can count on my hand how many times my mom told me she loved me." Tilda's discomfort was shown in the back-and-forth shuttling of her between her mother and grandparents. At that time in her life, Tilda felt that "everything was out of whack. I didn't know whether I was going or coming." Nonetheless, Tilda kept her unsettling emotions to herself. She couldn't understand them because of her immaturity, but she could list them in her mind: loneliness, anger, abandonment, discouragement, and the unshakeable feeling of loneliness. Actually, Tilda could recall a most helpless time in her young life:

> When my mom had gotten married later on and when they had gotten a divorce, I felt that was it, because I really loved him. He took the role of my father and I didn't live with them but I was around him a lot and I didn't see a divorce coming or really understand when they divorced, he stopped calling and he stopped coming around. I just felt alone because I felt like now nobody really loves me.

In fact, Tilda was sure that she saw a pattern of abandonment. Parental figures kept leaving her behind. Tilda thought that she finally had a mother and father together. She also thought that her mother was settled. Despite the fact that Tilda was aware that it was difficult to even be in a room with her mother for more than an hour, she desperately wanted a family in spite of her mother's lack of affection.

Primary-Care Provider

Tilda couldn't resist returning to an emotional time in her childhood when her mother got married again. Her mother was married multiple times throughout her childhood. She was 14 years old. The desire for her own family unit catapulted Tilda to her mother. Tilda ventured away from the safety of her grandparents' home and went to live with her mother and new husband. She wanted to see if she could build a relationship

or at least on some level connect with her mother. But it never felt right from the very beginning. It ended in an ugly way with Tilda scared and lost. Tilda explained the scene:

> I didn't know him. When I first met him he was very mean. There was something about him I didn't like but I decided to move in with my mom to try again and he told me I have to go and no one can change his mind. I told my mom that I didn't want to move but she made me feel as if I was the reason why things weren't going right in her life; that I messed up her life when I was born. So, they kicked me out. It was a big fight and my mom told me that she was done with me and it really hit me, she really doesn't want me, my mom really doesn't want me and I know that if she had a choice, she would of gotten rid of me. So, I went back to my grandparents.

By the time Tilda arrived at her grandparents' house, her mother had called her grandmother and presented the events in such a way that it favored her rather than Tilda. So, when Tilda opened the door and entered, she was met with a barrage of questions that further crushed her spirit, and under the weight of reality, she crumbled to the floor and wept. It unfolded dramatically that day:

> As soon as I walked through the door, it was Why did you? Why did you? and I felt like no one gave me a chance to explain anything. I sat on the floor and just cried and wailed and wailed, cried and wailed and I said that I'm done with everything; I'm not talking to nobody but I had a friend that just came . . .

Tilda's friend convinced her to leave with her. But Tilda picked herself up off the floor. Something told her that she couldn't just stay there wounded and broken; she had to move; she had to save herself. Tilda's friend kept close and ministered to her. The agony Tilda felt would last for years, but that day, her friend got her to go to school, then to church with her. Tilda slowly found a safe place in her mind where she could function. Tilda was able to eventually move forward; she was able to get over the excruciating pain of knowing that she was unwanted by the person who gave her life.

School Life

School was a place where Tilda didn't talk about her father. Besides, not even in her personal life was there much talk about him. Sometime in her school experience she saw schoolchildren being awful to one of her friends who divulged to them that her own father was in jail. The children made fun of Tilda's friend. She never forgot how she felt witnessing the meanness, so she promised herself to avoid the topic of her father if she could help it. Deep down she knew that if her situation were ever exposed, she would defend him. After all, Tilda's family, by not talking frankly to her about this issue of perpetual law breaking, made her believe that it was normal and that it didn't affect her, but it did.

When Tilda began elementary school at age 5, her grandmother and minister grandfather acted as her surrogate parents. Her mother had just deposited her at their home. Tilda didn't notice this change, but it was happening quietly and without fuss. Her grandparents took care of her material needs. They took her shopping for school. For Tilda, it was better when her mother wasn't around because she was so negative toward her. Once the school year began, her mother would drop in periodically to help Tilda with any homework. However, Tilda's mother complained that it was an inconvenience to her. Tilda's mother continued sending her those negative messages throughout her elementary-school days.

Her mother's behavior caused Tilda to act out by not engaging in school activities. Tilda seemed to be exhibiting antisocial behavior; she wouldn't get involved with school bands or chorus. The main reason for this behavior turned out to be that she feared that she would have to beg her family for their attendance. Her grandfather

confessed that he was busy and her mother used as her excuse the fact that she had no transportation. Therefore, Tilda found herself believing that everything was her fault. She explained:

> That would affect me . . . when I went to school, I didn't trust anyone. I didn't want to get close to anyone because I felt that they were going to leave and if I saw a family, that made me angry. I didn't like seeing families and I didn't like to see a mom or a dad and children. I had so much jealousy toward them. Maybe I shouldn't be a part of anything because I don't want to see everybody else with their family. I couldn't be with mine. It was rough. I had a lot of off days but somehow, I always had good grades. I just got in a lot of trouble. I don't know. I just felt sad a lot.

Tilda had no one to depend on for consistent support. She couldn't call her father; he was in prison. She couldn't call his family because they offered her nothing. So, by the time she graduated from fifth grade, it had become hard for her to process that she had an unreliable family. Tilda explained her feelings candidly:

> My mom and aunt came and it was just so hard not having [my father]. . . . That was the only thing I wanted. I didn't care about the diploma. I was able to write him and tell him Dad, I graduated. I didn't think I was going to be able to do it but I did but it was really hard going. He was proud of me because I used to tell him all the time I don't like school, I hate school, I don't want to go to school. I want to live with you. It turned out he was happy I got the diploma.

High-school years went by somewhat easier for Tilda. One reason was that her father came home and he stayed out of trouble. Tilda discovered that she couldn't see him. He was living with his other family, and that made her angry. She felt that she needed more time with him, and so she protested:

> I still felt like I didn't know my dad. I knew him but I didn't know him and I would only go on weekends when my mom would come get me and I'll be crying, Please Daddy I don't want to go, let me just stay, especially when he first came home. I remember just sobbing in a ball . . . I can't go. I don't want to go.

Tilda's private world might not have been ideal but her academic world had its own set of challenges, too. Tilda told no teacher about her situation because she thought

that she would be judged by her father's record. However, the circumstances of her home life greatly affected her decisions. One day she decided to drop out of high school after she allowed her grades to slip. No one in her family took her to task for making such a drastic life-changing decision. Ultimately, her church family stepped in and strongly encouraged her to return to school. Someone whom she trusted reached her and convinced her that it wasn't about her mother or her father anymore; it was about her and what she needed to do for herself. So Tilda went back to school. She explained her path to recovery:

> I applied for night school. I got all my work. I crammed it in one year's session and got my diploma. I went to extra courses in the summer and that was the happiest time in my life because finally, it's about me. It's about me being happy and making good choices.

Tilda's night-school teachers gave her the support that she needed and the self-confidence not only to finish academic courses but embrace life's challenges with optimism. Tilda had to make up her mind that she desired success and that she was willing to put forth effort to accomplish much.

Learning to Cope

Over the years, Tilda continued building a relationship with her father and relishing the bond that had grown between them. By the time he was incarcerated for the last time, she was 15 or 16 years old, and she felt comfortable in beginning communication with him through writing. He had requested that she do so, and a new dimension in their personal journey began. Tilda stated:

> He would write me and send me cards. I would begin to write back and in the letters, I just expressed in them how I felt alone, and I just felt like he wasn't there for me, and I wanted him to know the effect and I wanted him to know that I wanted him to do better. I'll let him know that I was by his side . . . I wasn't angry. . . . He wrote me

> back and he let me know how hard it was on him . . . so all this time I felt I was the only one being affected but he had some anger toward himself for not being there for me. . . . We were able to talk about it and the emotions and the anger that I had was able to be released. I was able to finally talk about it after all those years. I just told him how I felt and how things were working out at home and different things.

When Tilda had a chance to quietly go over in her mind what transpired between her father and herself, she realized that her success hinged on her finding a way to deal with her emotions. She had to have the strength to go beyond the circumstance of her life, and she did. But she carried some concern for others in similar circumstances. She mused about her life and concluded that she would encourage children to talk to someone. She expressed her feelings about the emptiness:

> It affected me keeping my emotions bottled up because I felt like I had everything under control and I really didn't have nothing under control. The emotions that's bottled up comes out and it affects so many people and I didn't even realize that because of my hurt, I hurt others. . . . I wasn't accepting others. They could have been there to help me but because of my resistance, being afraid to be let down again . . . if I would have opened up earlier, it could've been different.

Tilda had a destructive mother who did her best to break her daughter's spirit. But she didn't know her daughter well. Tilda had finally adapted and learned how to cope through her admission that she couldn't do it alone; she needed support and the freedom to talk about how she felt about being abandoned.

Resilience and Successes

When Tilda was 18 years old, she committed her life to God. She depended on Him and she believes that with His guidance, she discovered how to love herself. Tilda credits God completely for revealing to her the path to recovery. She believes He helped her confront the one thing missing from her life. She actually could not pinpoint what was missing at first because she had no idea how much resentment and hate she had for

herself because of failures and feeling like everything was her fault. Nevertheless, through a process of healing, Tilda forgave herself and began to love the young woman she was becoming. Tilda also credits a prayer life because she knows that her experiences would usually have many people losing "their minds from situations" like hers.

When Tilda reviewed her experiences with a critical eye toward sharing precisely how she felt and what contributed to her success, she had to pause and savor how far she had come:

> I was afraid of failure because I was afraid of letting my father down. I didn't want to disappoint him. . . . I was afraid of fulfilling the thoughts my mom had a label for me. I was going to be pregnant at a young age and I was going to drop out of school and be on this drug and that drug. I was going to be an out-of-control child but I knew that wasn't in me. I didn't want to be homeless; I didn't want to have no job, no car; I didn't want to have no career. I didn't want to be alone. I didn't want to be strung out on drugs. . . . I have a lot of family members who didn't go to college. . . . I didn't want to be a part of that. I just didn't.

Tilda was motivated to achieve success because she had her father's emotional support through hugs when she needed them. Tilda's mother's negativity compelled her to look closer at herself and be determined to do something about the mean pronouncement on her life. The words spoken from Tilda's mother, "[You] will never be anything," were just what Tilda needed to be inspired to prove her wrong. Tilda realized that she could have an opportunity to encourage children; she thought about what she would say to children of prisoners if she had the chance to speak:

> It is not their fault. The decisions that their parents have made is not their fault. . . . They don't have to protect themselves from their feelings. It's okay to feel the way that they feel because I was one that felt like the emotions that I had weren't right. . . . I would let them know that it's okay to feel hurt; it's okay to feel alone and it's okay to feel abandoned because once you grasp the emotions that you feel, you're able to find the help that you need. I would encourage them to talk to someone.

Tilda likes how she turned out, and she now considers her father the hero in her life. She is aware of all those little promises he used to make and break, but he kept the most important promise he has ever made to Tilda: He promised that he would stay out of jail, and he has been enjoying freedom for the past 5 years. In Tilda's eyes he proved to her that he could keep a promise.

Presently, Tilda is ambitious. She wants to open up day-care centers to fulfill her dream of helping children. She wants to work with children because she knows something about childhood issues that are created by the bad behavior of parents. She volunteers at day-care centers to give love and attention to those who need it. She aspires to counsel girls because she believes that when fathers are absent from girls' lives, there is emptiness, a void. Tilda learned some lessons that she would like to share. The first lesson is not to look for love in the "wrong places." The second lesson is to see the danger in yearning for male attention. Tilda explained:

> It is worse when you are young, you don't understand your emotions and you don't understand why you feel the way you feel. . . . When it's silent it makes it seem as if it's okay . . . the situation is okay . . . it's okay for daddy not to be around. . . . I have friends whose fathers weren't there and they ended up with kids.

The last lesson that Tilda learned is that she needed to feel secure and she needed to understand the role fathers play in the lives of their daughters. They are supposed to be their daughters' heroes.

Tilda considered what advice she would like to give research scholars and educational practitioners. She simply suggested that they should look carefully at the emotional roller coaster of children of prisoners. They need to have a relationship with that incarcerated person. The left-behind parents and family need to be careful with their silence or speech. Children need explanations. Those children who are told that the

locked-up parent is bad (and even when that person changes, there is no acceptance) must not be made to shun that parent, whom they are longing for or feel the need to know. Tilda asserted that she kept her father in her life, and now she is so glad. She said, "I would really be paying for it you know. . . . I have a relationship with my dad. When I have kids they'll be able to have a grandfather or when I get married, he'll be able to give me away."

Tilda still holds out hope for her biological parents to give her what they have never given her before: a family unit consisting of the three of them. She envisions her ideal family and restated, "All I want was my real mom, my real dad and me to be together."

Millie: An Independent Doer

Introduction

Millie is a very independent 19-year-old who lives in a neighborhood in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern region of the United States. She considers the lessons she has learned from having a father who has been incarcerated multiple times throughout her childhood. She has learned that she is an achiever who is slightly lazy because she knows that she is smart. She has also learned that she can face challenges and can conquer. She is proud of having graduated high school at 17 and will quickly add that if she had worked harder, she could have graduated by age 16. Currently, she is meeting the rigorous academic standards of a local college.

Millie's family is unconventional. The unit consists of Millie's mother, father, Millie, and her younger brother, as well as five half-brothers and -sisters, children from Millie's father's previous relations who were raised, basically, by her mother. During

Millie's childhood, these half-siblings would come and go, at times living short periods with their own mothers. At this time, her mother was married to her father. Moreover, Millie had to find her place in her complex world where most things were not normal, although her family acted as though they were, indeed, normal.

Millie cannot remember a period in her life when her household was not turned upside down by her father's issues. She has seen the consequences of criminal behavior, and she wants no part of that life.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

Millie was less than 5 years old when she noticed that her father was no longer present in her house. No one said anything at first, but she noticed time passing and no appearance of her father. Millie's expectations were not unreasonable because he lived with them. Therefore, she should have seen him daily as before. But the disappearance of her father seemed to cast a shadow over her house, and finally her mother told her the news that would be repeated many times over her childhood: Her father was in prison. Initially, Millie had no reason to feel insecure because she had her mother.

However, she was impacted by seeing her father arrested later during one of his short periods out of prison. He committed some infraction and was arrested in front of her. She was playing outside when it happened. Her mother was home, and when she realized what was happening, she had an adult cousin grab Millie and remove her from the scene. But Millie had already witnessed the worst, and she cried and screamed. Millie was affected by her father's criminal behavior, and she didn't like feeling so angry. She was just a little girl.

Up until that moment, Millie saw herself as "Daddy's girl." She loved him. In her short life, she had spent much time around him. They were close. When he first left, she asked questions of her mother, who would respond in a reassuring manner, saying things such as "He's away right now, and he'll be back." As Millie grew and matured a little more, she resented his absence and found herself drifting away from her father. She realized that by the time she reached her teenage years, she didn't enjoy a healthy, stable relationship with him. They lost their closeness over the years, and this loss still remains a source of pain.

Nevertheless, Millie did visit her father several times in prison. At age 5, she found the visits hard emotionally. She remembers her father receiving a year's sentence, as well as a couple of months here and there, and the adjustment this lifestyle demanded of her. The frequent visits to various prisons during her childhood made it clear to Millie that she didn't like this situation. She became discouraged and despondent as a little girl. As she reached adolescence, she viewed the prison world with indifference. The visiting procedures weren't child-friendly; she didn't like what she had to do to see her father. She felt like a criminal every time she had to take off her shoes, stand, and be scanned. The rules were many, and she constantly questioned authority. The no-jeans, no-bandanas policy was just two of the rules she had to obey. She was a child.

Millie remembers that 5-year-old child calling out to an inmate father, "I don't want to leave." However, on most occasions, by the time she reached the car, she had settled down until the next visit. The visits were important because Millie could touch and hug her father. Millie got caught up in the fantasy that her father would always come home after a year or a few months, and that seemed to soothe her. At one point in her

childhood, her father remained free for a while. But eventually she detached herself from him because she blamed him for the unnatural way he made her live. She once cared very much, but the repeated imprisonments became normal for her family, and she felt that such a situation was wrong.

Millie asserted that life was always pretty good when her father was home but each time he left for prison, a weirdness came over the family. During those times, Millie acted out, sometimes having a bad temper. Her straight-talking grandmother would admonish her, speaking familiar words her mother spoke often: "If you keeping doing what you're doing, you're going to go with him." By then, Millie was angry at her father and felt that their loving relationship had disintegrated. The warnings became part of everyday life with her mother, and Millie accepted it. Her mother wanted to make sure that Millie understood that there were always consequences for doing bad things.

Primary-Care Provider

Millie's mother really did feel the pressure of influencing her children, especially Millie. Due to her husband's frequent absences from the home, she became solely responsible for the family. Millie saw her mother struggle alone:

> Mother . . . she did everything by herself . . . had a job . . . took care of us, made sure that I had and provided for us . . . so if she could do it then, I could do it by myself without depending on other people. . . . That's why I am independent now. . . . I learned from her. . . . I did babysitting for extra money. . . . I did get a job. . . . I had two jobs in high school.

Life in Millie's home didn't run smoothly because of the complex family dynamics. Her father had five older children whom her mother tried to influence while she had them. Unfortunately, they returned to their biological mother at crucial times in their lives and this was reflected in the choices that they eventually made:

> When they came with us, they went to school. My mom made them go to school but they left our house. . . . went back with their moms. . . . They got older and wanted to do whatever. . . . my brother, he was in our house. . . . She made sure I was different, she made sure. . . . because I was hers, I guess, and I'm not saying that she didn't love them any less but she didn't want me to end up with no job and depending on people. . . . I had a choice.

Millie's mother was crushed when her own son later followed the example of his half-brothers and half-sisters, and dropped out of high school. So Millie received an enormous amount of attention and counsel from her mother because she did not want her own daughter to be like any of them. As Millie reflected on those childhood years in her mother's care, she had to admit that "Mother made sure that I made the right decisions. . . . It was too scary."

As time passed, Millie's father played less and less of a role in her home. When he was back in town, it didn't make a difference in her life. Most of the time, he didn't come home. Therefore, he was not connected and had no idea what she was doing in school. Millie saw it as a lack of caring, when she compared his involvement in her life to that of her mother. Her mother knew her so well that she actually stopped checking Millie's homework by the time she reached middle school. According to Millie, "she knew that I would do it anyway."

School Life

Millie liked school. She was advanced for her age, and so she was enrolled in school by the time she was 3. Throughout her school years, Millie adhered to the code:

> Whatever goes on in the house, stays in the house! I was pretty good in school. High school, I was good; goody shoes, I was very good. Got A's and B's and then I went downhill. For some reason, I didn't like school no more and at that time nothing I believe felt right. I don't know how to explain. I was getting older and I had a choice. I never got too far behind where I was failing and I always maintained basically good grades. I always knew that I was going to be a nurse since I was small and I always

> said that and in the ninth grade, they said you can go to tech (a specialized high school) for free if you have good grades so by the time I reached the eleventh grade I went to tech, so it would be good to get out and finish high school.

Millie suspected that people at her schools never knew the information about her father, but among her extended family and friends, it wasn't private; they knew his criminal history. Millie had positive experiences in the early part of her schooling. She had fond memories of her third-grade teacher, who saw her through a tough time with asthma:

> I was out for three weeks. She's the only one who called the house all the time, talked to me to see how I was doing and she gave my mom the homework because she knew I would do it even though I was sick. She always told me I was smart and you need to do things for yourself.

Later on, Millie was perplexed about what went so wrong to change her attitude toward school. It could have been a time that the wrong kind of friends influenced her or it could have been that the school wasn't a good fit for her. Regardless of the reason, she still was motivated to explore her potential. Besides, her mother's positive influence won out in the end.

Millie's own personal desires and goals paled compared to her older siblings' expectations of her. Her "regular brothers and sisters," as she called them, became the strong incentive to finish high school. Millie knew that they were watching and needed to see her succeed. They had fallen short; each one walked away from high school. One brother and one sister waited until they reached 12th grade to quit school. Millie had no intention of letting them down. She also felt a special responsibility to her younger sister, who was in need of a positive example. That sister was in danger of making some very poor choices. Millie was not only first to finish high school, but was also the first to give them hope for their own futures.

Millie held on to her mother's words of encouragement and affirmation. She was never pushed hard by her mother, just nudged. Today, she considers her mother her hero.

Learning to Cope

Millie used her inner strength as a way of coping. She worked hard to avoid being needy. She chose to lean on her mother for strength if she needed a boost. Millie trusted her mother's guidance as she evolved into an independent person. She kept busy. She considered the consequences of poor choices. She said, "If I get too rowdy or too aggressive sometimes, I know where it can go, and I don't want to go down that way. So I have to learn how to control it." Millie is determined to make the effort to become successful so that she can enjoy a better life after earning a degree.

Millie would love to have her father home with her. But she has no illusions about the prospects. As she looked into the dark parts of her life, she had words for other children of prisoners:

> Stay motivated for yourself and set goals for yourself. Everybody has friends but pick that one good friend, and a person who's doing the right thing or an adult or somebody who you think is doing the right thing. I don't look up to many people. Actually, my mom is the only one; that's it.

Resilience and Successes

Millie found her mother's influence over her life significant. With her family structure as unusual as it was, she felt that the constant instruction from her mother on appropriate behavior and the importance of a good education helped her to adapt and overcome circumstances not of her making. Millie had seen so much, and those experiences had left her more determined than ever, to make good choices:

> I never want to get in trouble. I didn't want to go to jail. I thought about things. Because some people who still have their mother, they still do what they want to do. They still go out and do every possible thing they can do and go to jail. My mother, she made sure that I made the right decisions. It was too scary. I would always think that could happen, this could happen. . . .I was too smart for my own good; I'd always think about the consequences because I don't have kids and I think people who have kids at my age have a problem. I'm not having a hard time and I'm surviving because I didn't go on that path. I thought about this, I said no, I'm not going to do that. I had a friend, I went to school with, her mom was in jail and her dad, she didn't know. She stayed with her aunt. She has two kids and she's 19 and we were in the Girl Scouts together. She went out and she invited me but, most times I never went, but she still wanted to party and still drink and now she is having a hard time.

Millie had many friends who became pregnant in high school. The trend became so bad that it was like a "big boom." Everybody that she knew there had "two or three" children. This price was too high for Millie. For her mother's sake, Millie needed to develop into someone who "for the most part" she could like. She sees traits of both parents in herself.

Millie measures her successes by the good choices that she eventually made in her teenage years. Her college grade point-average is 3.6. Today, she is emotionally healthy. She has conquered the past enough to have made better choices by learning from each negative experience caused by her father's imprisonments. She has earned a certificate that enables her to handle medicines as she continues working and attending the college institute. Most of all, she has withstood the challenges of her school environment and has not followed the behavior patterns she has observed. She has no children.

If she had the opportunity to share her story with children like herself, Millie promised to be candid. She said she would tell them:

> If I can do it, then you can. I was in the same position as you and when you only have one person at home, you guys can do it. If I made good choices, so can you. You make the decision whether you're going down the same path as your parent or make a better choice. Do the right thing and be successful in life. My parents, they did make mistakes, learn from their mistake.

Millie still longs for her father to stop going back to prison and for him to try to set an example for his children. She never forgot how strict he was before his arrest and imprisonments. He would beat his children for misbehaving or breaking rules. It would have been good for her to have him be a constant force during childhood. She relished the idea of speaking to him from her adult advantage point in this way:

> You made a couple of mistakes and you knew that you had kids. When you have kids, things change. You can't do what you want to do at all times. You could have made an effort to stay home more. It would have made a difference, maybe, not to me, but for my sister the most.

Currently, what matters most to her are being self-sufficient and obtaining success in the future. However, she never lets go of her personal inspirations for her positive movement forward: her mother and her younger sister. Of all the lessons she learned and that have been engrained in her mind, the most important one for her is to "stay out of trouble."

Millie saw different people achieving, and she recognized that she had it within herself to go further academically. She made a decision to stretch herself, and the result has been phenomenal. She was adamant about correcting how children of prisoners are viewed by scholars in the social science arena. She wanted them to know that "everybody isn't the same. We all don't go to jail. We all don't do bad things." Moreover, Millie asserted, children of prisoners are contributors to society. They are "doctors, lawyers," and entrepreneurs.

Mason: I Can Still Love My Father

Introduction

Mason is 27 years old. He resides on the East Coast of the United States. He is the fourth of seven children. Mason has five siblings and two half siblings. Mason did not live with his father prior to his incarceration when he was 4 years old. His parents were not married at the time of the first arrest and imprisonment. In fact, they didn't marry until he was a first-grader.

Mason experienced a childhood impacted by a father who continued breaking the law. His father was incarcerated multiple times over Mason's most impressionable years. The longest Mason's father stayed out of prison was for 2 years. His father's most recent release to the community was in 2009. Mason had no idea how he felt after 23 years of constant disappointment. But he does know that he wants to dedicate his future professional life to the service of children. He is optimistic that he will find his place in society.

Currently, Mason works in construction. He has had some college education and sees himself returning to school because of his aspiration to accomplish much more. He also thinks often about the wear and tear on his body over time, and that has become another incentive for him to return to school. He has lived on his own for 3 years. When he considered why he never exhibited criminal behavior, he said, "I had my share of fighting, but that's it. I never wanted to be like my dad." His remedy for lessening the impact of parental incarceration is simple: Parents should stay home more and stop running the streets.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

Mason was about 5 years old when he was told by his mother that his father was in jail and she was going to visit him. He didn't understand what it all meant, even when he found himself standing at the prison gates. He recounted this first experience:

> It wasn't bad. I just remember walking through prison and walking through the metal detector and going to a back area. They had picnic tables where you could visit parents and I remember running up to him and saying hello and I was more happy to see him. I thought I did, but as I got older I could see that I really didn't. My mom talked to him. . . . I guess a part of me wanted to be loved.

That particular prison was close to Mason's home, but at other times his father was incarcerated a vast distance away. There was a period when his father was locked up for 5 years and Mason went once to visit him. The prison was many miles away, and it was a hardship on small children. The long hours to travel to see a father who couldn't stay out of prison was no longer appealing to Mason. Mason was older and he preferred not to see the man. He wanted to stay home and play with his friends. He felt confused.

However, sometime during Mason's childhood, he realized that his father would not be around to help take care of him. His father was in and out of prison too often. Mason's life fell into a pattern of visiting his father in one of the state prisons and being shuttled between his mother's place and that of his maternal grandmother. His mother worked, and eventually she moved her children into her mother's home. Mason's grandmother became the custodian of him and his siblings. He didn't mind being there because his mother was there when she wasn't working or going to school. His grandmother loved him. But one day, Mason had another change in his life. His mother moved them out, and once he and his brothers and sisters were no longer physically with his grandmother, his father came around. Mason recounted:

> He came out of jail. . . . my father was looking out for a while . . . then once he was back in jail, my mother had to get another babysitter. . . . We were going back and forth to my grandmother's house after school. She watched us. When my mom moved out to our house, the first house; all family covered for her . . . a lot of stuff. My aunt looked out for us.

In his younger years, Mason was very close to his mother. He was considered a "mother's boy" in the family. By age 13 or 14, he bragged about their lost relationship to his younger sister. At that time, Mason felt the distance widen between him and his mother due to constant clashing over her unfair treatment of him. His mother seemed to always take his sister's side, and Mason was left to ask, "What happened to me and you?" The effect was just as heart-wrenching as losing his father to prison. He no longer would "stay up under" his mother.

Mason felt hardship around age 13 in other ways, too. The reality of his mother's life had caught up with her, and she shared her personal struggles with only his grandmother, grandmother's sister, and another aunt. The result of this withdrawal of intimacy caused Mason to feel lonely and hurt. He already felt estranged from his father. He felt that his father was blind to the pain he had inflicted on him. Mason missed him:

> I remember he loved to play. He'd always play and joke and I guess I always looked forward to that. I'd say at times when he was around, he was a friend. I guess it's a way of showing love. He would play just as little kids play. . . . He would play hide and go seek. I remember I was playing a lot . . . maybe, like 7. . . . I was in first grade. I remember my older sister pushed me down the hill one time when he was there. I got glass stuck in my foot. He had his way of making me laugh when I was hurt. . . . I guess it was just the way he did things. . . .a friend more than a parent.

Life without his father became normal. Mason claimed that "it was as if he was always on vacation." But when the news came that his father was coming home, every child jumped with excitement. As it was, Mason's household was already unconventional in structure. Mason's half-siblings came, stayed, and left repeatedly. When they left to

return to their permanent home, Mason had to go with them for a few months. The rotation of children continued until all eight children had a turn to live someplace else for a short time.

By the time Mason reached his teenage years, much had already happened, and so he felt vulnerable, deeply hurt, and filled with resentment because his needs weren't being met. He blamed his father for being too selfish to see that his family needed him:

> It wasn't just his in and out of prison, it's the more he got in and out of prison, the worse he got and everything started changing. . . . It got so bad when he came out, instead of coming home, he'd run the streets for a couple of years before he'd come home. He was in the streets, then back in jail. Something would happen before he'd come home. It was more like, Where's my dad?

Mason desired a male parent to be in his life as he grew and developed. He felt that he needed to be guided into manhood. Instead, he had to contend with a father who continued to interrupt his life in hurtful ways. For example, he witnessed his father being arrested in their house by several policemen. The neighbors also witnessed the scene as he was taken away. They began to look at Mason differently. They never made it easy for him after that incident. Mason lamented that "every time I did something, they always said, 'You're going to be just like your dad.'" Not one of the neighbors understood that their words impacted Mason in a negative way. He felt that they never saw beyond his father. They judged him harshly because he was his son.

Primary-Care Provider

Mason had difficult years as he grew up in his mother's house. He was a troubled boy. His mother tried her best. She had to bring up six children by herself. She had to be both mother and father. Everything fell to her, and somehow she developed patience and a gentle hand to guide her children. Mason admitted that "my mom couldn't teach me the

stuff about a boy." However, he was influenced by the positive things that she did to steer him in the right direction. During those years, she was highly sensitive over some things Mason insisted on discussing with her. She felt burdened and inadequate to handle single parenthood. So when Mason questioned her, she would quickly say, "I tried, I tried." Mason wished that she understood him better, and he missed their closeness. He also felt somewhat discouraged at times. He described what he learned over the years:

> I don't have a normal family and sometimes you feel like you're the outcast of the family and sometimes you feel you're the cause of why everything is happening but I had to learn to really get on my knees. The experiences I have with God helped me through but I had to fully understand about God and who He was for me to get over and get through.

Mason's mother taught her children whatever she could, but she couldn't give them an honorable father. Because she held on to this dream of having Mason's father home regularly, she wouldn't let Mason's father go; she took each child at different times to visit at various prisons. All through Mason's childhood, she continued visiting every prison in which his father was incarcerated. In the meantime, Mason was struggling with his absence, and she was unaware of how deeply he was affected. Mason considered himself "messed up and a confused child." His mother remained loyal to a man who brought misery to her home in the form of the treatment that he inflicted on them. His father never spared his mother when he was being awful.

As a little boy, Mason had a picture in his head of the ideal father who would act like the fathers he so envied. Mason looked for a caring, loving father, but his own had allowed prison life to change him, and it was reflected in how he treated Mason. By the time Mason reached his teenage years, he simply longed for peace of mind. He was

around 13 or 14 when he began to have unusual experiences. Even today, he ponders over one experience in particular:

> I don't want you to think I'm crazy but one experience I remember and I don't know if it was a vision or if it really happened. But, I remember sitting on my grandma's steps and looking at the front door and seeing Jesus standing out there with His hands stretched open and I wasn't really in the church at the time. The spirit of God letting me know that I'm here. I'm there, keeps me growing. It keeps giving me hope that there's something better.

The impact of seeing his father being incarcerated multiple times affected Mason emotionally and mentally. His determination to not be like him was strong, and it weighed Mason down. Mason believed that he saw the vision because of the stress he was experiencing and also because he desperately needed something spiritual to hold on to. He saw his family life as discouraging. Mason actually asserted, "I don't have a normal family." He felt like its outcast, and sometimes he indulged himself in believing that he was the cause of all that happened in the family. But he learned to pray, and his experiences with God that followed helped him.

School Life

Mason entered school believing that no one understood him. He carried around the burden of his circumstances. Socially, he engaged in activities at school. He looked happy but he wasn't, and he wanted someone to take enough interest in him to probe deeper. He wanted to tell somebody about his pain.

From elementary days up until high school, Mason found academics easy. However, he had been damaged by his father's criminal activities and behavior toward the family over time. Mason needed his school officials to take an interest in him. He himself said that he was "a mess." But all the teachers saw was a boy who suffered from

attention deficiency. At first, Mason was more interested in being accepted socially and worried about people coming into his life and then leaving him. He was so worried about this negative pattern of others' behavior that he spent much time fabricating scenarios that fit his thinking. If he perceived something wrong in any relationship, he'd back away.

In high school, the teachers kept trying to put Mason in a special education class. He used to get mad because he was made to do repetitious work that he had already mastered. He challenged himself in every academic task and nagged a particular teacher to give him harder work. Unfortunately, this escalated to the point that Mason wasn't welcomed in that class anymore. The teacher insisted that he should be reassigned to special education classes. A letter was sent home, and his father read it. Mason became deflated over his comments:

> My father came home from jail . . . he read that letter . . . it was like he didn't know me anymore. . . . He saw what they wanted to do, he started making fun of me, saying Oh you retard, you going to let them put you in this kind of class. I went from having my best friend to having my worst enemy. . . . So I started backing out from him. I was hurt because I knew I wasn't. . . . I knew how I could understand quick and learn how to do things. . . . It affected me a lot because I struggled so hard to not be like him and not to be what he said. . . . I tried too hard to where I started messing up in school.

Mason's mother met with the administration and asked, "What's wrong? There's nothing wrong with his work." As a result of the meeting, Mason and his mother had to go in front of a school board to resolve the matter. The scene in the room that day became ugly:

> The principal was nice until we got to the board meeting. . . . Me and my mom went in at the same time. . . . They wanted to see if they were going to put me in the class. What happened, the principal got mad, he did the same thing my father did. . . . He was my friend one minute, then when it wasn't going his way. . . . they were talking about not putting me in the class. They were not going to do what the school wanted

> me to do. But, I didn't know that's what the principal wanted. . . . but once he started, he said, If he comes back in my school, I'm going to suspend him every time he is late or if he spits, sneezes, something like that. Then, he got up and left. My mom looked and said, Oh no, you are getting out of this school! I said, Wow, that is something. He acted like my friend but turned his back on me.

After the school board meeting, Mason's mother removed him immediately. He was home schooled. One of the teachers came from the school and taught Mason. As Mason put it, "that's how I finished high school." He remains proud of his accomplishment because so many believed that he would fail. But he persevered and proved them wrong. His sentiment "I won't be nothing" evaporated when he graduated.

Learning to Cope

Mason's high-school experience taught him how much he wanted to succeed. He had learned to cope when others expected him to crumble under the pressure of harmful talk directed at him. He acknowledged that one problem for children like him, struggling with home issues relating to parental incarceration, is that no one asks how they feel. From his perspective, "nobody knows how to approach them." Mason's childhood experiences taught him not to trust, but as he developed into a young man, he recognized that he needed people. He needed them to ask him the right questions; he needed them to see under the smile and see the embarrassment and the hurt. Mason needed people to want to listen, even when he struggled saying the words "My father is not around."

To protect him from additional disappointment, he learned to back away emotionally from people. However, he eventually learned to trust when church leaders began to invest in him by building him up and assuring him that "it's going to be okay." Mason recalled another significant moment in his life:

> I was 17 years old. Everywhere I went, they knew my dad. They never gave me a chance. It actually helped me. I don't want to be like my dad. People started saying You're going to be like your dad. I said I am not going to be like my dad. One time, I just cried to my pastor. He saw the tears. It got overwhelming. I told him, I don't want to be like my dad. I don't care what happens in life, I don't want to be like him. I've seen the way he treated my mom; the way he treated me. [My pastor] believed me . . . he gave me hope. It's like God used him to give me that hope.

That day, Mason got what he needed: assurance that he was worth much. The pastor told him that although Mason felt hurt, he should hold on to his self-esteem. His life would get better the more he would grow in understanding. The pastor's words that remain with Mason to this day are "You're not going to be like him."

Mason has come through the hardest of times, and he has made it. He relished the opportunity to tell other children of prisoners to follow their own path to success. He spoke with passion:

> Get away from the ones that's doing wrong because you're going to pick up the same pattern-thing that you're around. You want to be rich, hang around rich folks, they'll teach you and show you and it's just the same thing for wisdom. Hang around somebody with wisdom. I had to learn to get away from everybody that was doing nothing. If they weren't going after what I was going after in life, I had to get away from them.

Mason left his birthplace, the drugs, the robbery, and the familiarity of his neighborhood and relocated to another state to be around people like him. He remains there today. He has no family nearby.

Resilience and Successes

According to the people in his life, Mason was supposed to be dead by the time he was 25. He proudly acknowledged his joy at not being swallowed by the streets as his father was. Mason feels he has much more to accomplish, so he doesn't allow his thoughts to dwell on the pain anymore. He has had his share of experiences—even some

spiritual ones—as well as life lessons that guide his steps. He has risen from the shadow of having an imprisoned parent and has moved to an emotional place where the pain is not there, the resentment and grudge against his father have been eradicated, and the weight of all his woes has disappeared. Mason is no longer shy, and he holds a high-school diploma to prove that he is resilient. His shared a hymn that has become his anthem:

> Nobody loves me like you do: You took me through hard times in my life and when I didn't obey your word, you gave me another try. The discouragement overwhelmed my soul, when discouragement overwhelmed my soul, and sorrow filled my heart, you calmed my fears, and dried away my tears. Nobody loves me like you do. Where would I be or what would I've done or how could I have made it through the night? You put up with me whether I was wrong or right. Lord, nobody loves me like you do.

Mason has been given the gift of love, and because of this, he has learned to love and forgive. Today he can love his father. He is complete in his faith. He is proud where he is in life, although he insists that "there's more to come. It takes time. I believe I'm going to get there." He summarized his perspective:

> I see how far I am from where I used to be and from what could've happened to me . . . proud . . . so if I stand and look at myself, I just sit back and smile. . . . I can die tonight but I still got a smile. They said that I would never accomplish nothing. . . . I accomplished a lot, even if it is overcoming.

The most ambitious thing Mason wants to do is help people: "Not just people that grew up like I did or worse. I want to be a counselor. But my main goal is just to be a man of God." He longs to understand his father. He has always known why his father did the terrible things to himself and to his family. But Mason wants more; he wants a reformed father. Mason argues that his father is too old to continue his habit of running the streets.

Mason is motivated by one man, his pastor—a servant of God who exhibits great spirituality. Mason admires how he treats his fellowmen. His example has been such a powerful one for Mason. Mason's path has been straighter since his pastor took the time to sit, listen, and talk with him when he needed it most. He acted like the father Mason desired so badly.

If Mason had the opportunity to tell his story in a high-school setting to children of incarcerated parents, he'd encourage them with these simple words:

> Seek God and school. . . . just really, really pray. It takes prayer to get over a lot of things. First, you got learn to forgive the people. I learned to forgive [my father] for not being there. I was hurt and I had to grow up basically alone. I'm a man. Go to a pastor because you can't go to everybody. I couldn't trust everybody because of what I was going through. . . . You need to talk to somebody. People have a way of manipulating you to keep you around them. Get away from the people. People have a way of confusing you. The people that's running the streets and selling drugs and robbing people, they're missing something themselves. Find out who are your friends. I was a strong person and people always wanted to keep me around.

If Mason had the opportunity to speak forthrightly to his biological father, he would warn him of the danger of trying to go back, saying, "You just can't." He would advise his father to take the time to mend that love relationship he once had with his children and his wife. Mason knows that will take time to do so because "much hurt has to be healed. So many wounds have to be healed." In short, Mason continues to hope.

In addition, Mason never feels close enough to God, but he is so thankful that he didn't turn out to be like his father, despite having inherited some of his traits. Mason made a point to explain that humans need a greater power in their lives. His advice to those who think that they know from a scholarly viewpoint how prisoners' children live, is to think again. Those scholars cannot provide help if the children in question will not open up and talk about their innermost feelings. Mason admitted that he saw

psychologists, teachers, and others, and no one could help him with the pain. Therefore, he argues that, for the children's sake, there should be a spiritual aspect to the counseling approach, which helps children deal with their emotional pain caused by parental incarceration and the issues that ensue.

Madison: I Did Everything for My Brothers

Introduction

Madison is 25 years old and a state employee. She serves mentally challenged adults in a job that brings her satisfaction. She has 1 year left to complete her early-childhood education degree. She is hopeful that her academic development will lead to a career in social work. Madison still resides in the state that she grew up in, near her mother and siblings. She is the fourth child of six children. Madison carries such pride for her two youngest brothers who have been under her care since she was a third-grader. By contrast, Madison carries memories of a father who negatively impacted her life due to his repeated incarcerations over 20 years.

Madison's father lived with the family before his first arrest and imprisonment. He was married to her mother, but due to the constant absences, the rearing of their children fell completely to his wife. Madison was so affected by what she experienced during her childhood that she remembered announcing with conviction "I made sure what I saw didn't become my future."

She is on her own now. She considers herself blessed and celebrates her strength in overcoming the hardships of her past. The determination that got her through her home situation, school problems, and self-esteem issues has served as her beacon. She has

fought repeated defeat and has come through with enormous resilience, embracing her future endeavors with a sense of expectation and optimism.

Madison openly admits that she must always set the bar high and be a positive example for her siblings. Hence, there is no way that she would exhibit criminal behavior. She long ago figured that she would not only be different but also show how much she hated her father's choices by setting an example of a good person. When she recounts the stress brought on by parental incarceration, Madison is troubled by the fact that her father is counted among the other selfish criminal parents who seem to not care about how much their behavior bothers their children. She is convinced that children can be served best "if they would realize what they have at home." Madison knows that her father still does not grasp how much mental anguish he brought to the lives of his children. The damage her father inflicted was cruel because he was not around to fulfill their emotional needs.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

Madison was 2 years old when her mother announced that they were going to visit her father at "college." For the next 4 years, Madison accompanied her mother on those special trips to see her father. She noticed the bars but said nothing because she didn't understand what kind of place she was visiting until she was about 6 or 7 years old. One day, during a prison visit, she confronted her mother and demanded to know the truth. Madison opened up the dialogue by arguing that "this is not college. College doesn't have bars." Then she followed up by flooding her mother with questions such as "Why was he there with bars?" "Why did we have to go see him with all the cops?" Madison's mother responded in her own time. When she did, she spoke like a faithful wife who was

pushed into a place that made her quite uncomfortable. Madison was given this explanation:

> Daddy did something he wasn't supposed to do, so now he has to pay. . . . There are consequences, if you do bad things. There are consequences if you steal something from the store, then they lock you up or you have to pay a fine.

At 7 years old, Madison believed that she was smart enough to not be fooled again. So she listened with childlike interest to the information given. She felt that she had spent her whole life visiting her father in prison. She had gone happily with her family because this was, indeed their father, and they all wanted to see him. They were young children.

It follows, then, that she was horrified to experience, not once but a few times, the arrest of her father. Madison painted a clear picture of one incident when she was 7 or 8. She had been at home with her two younger brothers, her little cousin, and her father when the policemen arrived and raided and ransacked her home right in front of the four startled children:

> We didn't know what was going on. We were playing. . . . I remember the cops came in the house and we were told to go stay in the living room; they put my father in handcuffs and were all sitting there. We were scared. . . . Why do you have daddy in handcuffs? I don't think they answered. They started searching the couches and everything; the counter, they flipped beds over. The house was a mess by the time they were done and then they took us all to the precinct. They called my mom from work. My mom had to leave work and come pick us up.

In Madison's mind, she was screaming for her mother. She could hear herself say "Where's our mom? I want my mom! I want my mom!" Madison never really got over the trauma of that event. In addition, her discouragement became permanent when she saw her father being arrested "over and over." In her heart, she knew that children shouldn't have to be continually exposed to that kind of situation. She thought about the

fact that the police officers didn't seem to care, and it was obvious that her father didn't care because he "kept doing what he was doing knowing that we were always home." Under this daunting circumstance, Madison grew up.

As time went by, her relationship with her father diminished. The day came when Madison realized that the deterioration was permanent. She had tried to salvage some sort of relationship, but her father preferred the streets to working on rebuilding a connection with his daughter. His lifestyle caused Madison to view him as a needy, horrible person with whom she had a bad, abnormal relationship over time. The constantly disrupting back-and-forth, in-and-out-of-jail episodes convinced Madison that she had reasons to feel put-upon. At age 25, she doesn't want to have to run to pick him up here and there. Currently, he is out of jail and without a job, and he always needs something. His favorite words to her are "I'm stuck."

Primary-Care Provider

Although the years have slipped by, Madison's memories remain fresh. She can readily go back to her childhood and see herself as 9 years old. Her home's location was stable because it would take her mother 16 years to move from it, but life within was challenging and burdensome for Madison. At 9 years old, she was expected to pick up the slack due to her mother's absence because she had to work. Her mother spent no quality time with her children. The emotional and psychological pain came to Madison in her teenage years when she realized that she was simply tired:

> My older sister was always gone or working; my older brother was always running in the streets, my other brother basically in the street, so that left me to look after the two younger ones . . . it was always me. . . . By 9 years old, I had to cook for five of us. . . . Nine years old, I cooked full-course meals. I made sure my brothers had everything clean; school clothes, everything. I made sure they did their homework . . .

> had to help them with all their stuff. By always having to be there for my little brothers, I didn't really have time for me. I felt that I had to grow up fast. . . . I just did it all when I was younger. I was a mom at 9 years old.

Still, the worst moments were connected to her father. The visits to prison elicited false promises from him that he never bothered to try to keep. This always hurt Madison. She found him more terrible each time that he was released into the community. Madison's family rallied to try to help him to become a better person, but he didn't want their help. He didn't come home often, but most of the time when he walked through the doors, he was drunk. It was those times that Madison considered to be the worst moments of her young life. She witnessed her violent father lashing out at his children and wife. Madison recalled that he "mainly targeted" her and one of her brothers. The reason was that they both resembled their mother. The scenes were horrible because no one could stop him. When things finally subsided, Madison crumbled under the weight of knowing that, as she put it, "my own dad's trying to fight us and my mom."

School Life

By the time Madison was in high school, she found herself in a shaky place academically, not because she wasn't smart but because she sporadically went to classes. Along with one of her younger brothers, she suffered from asthma. This kept her from attending school regularly. However, the illness gave her no reason for stopping altogether. But she did because her life was spiraling out of control. Madison had been the caretaker of others for so long that she had worn herself out, mentally and physically. She found herself in trouble in her sophomore year. She gave a glimpse into what she had to do on a daily basis:

> My mom would get up and go to work at 6 in the morning. I had to be in school by 8:30, so I'd go to school when I felt like it because I was tired. I wrecked myself. I had so much to do. My mom worked two, three jobs, so she was never home, so the boys got home from school and as we got older, I had my homework, their homework, and I had to make sure they got baths, ate dinner and do the mom roles and I'm only 15, 16 years old.

When Madison reached the 11th grade, she experienced her crisis. She had allowed her messy personal life to stunt her academic growth in school. She had fallen to despair, and it took the jolt of failing high school to bring forth her resilient spirit. She began to attend classes and cram. Madison had to do 4 years of high school work in 2 years. Quickly, she realized that she had to go to summer school twice. She feared being left behind. Once again the horrible feeling of doom came upon her. She was somewhat prepared for being left back in 12th grade because she failed mathematics. She imagined every person in her high school judging her. The stigma that she felt was attached to her failure almost overwhelmed her.

But Madison did rise to the challenge. After she was unable to pass the mathematics examination, she eventually enlisted tutoring help. She explained her plight:

> I couldn't pass math. So I was in 12th grade again for math, that's it, just math. I had to go get help. My mom tried to help me when she was home. I got help from anywhere I could. I went everywhere. I can't pass these Regents, someone has to help me. I kept failing and failing and failing.

Thus, Madison and her principal had a conversation that led Madison to night school. This solved the stigma issues relating to her having to go to school beyond the usual 4 years. In fact, night school gave Madison back her self-esteem and moved her closer to wholeness. She soon passed the mathematics examination and received her high-school diploma. She didn't want a GED, and she never came close to getting one.

The day that she received the news, she ran through her house making unusual sounds of joy, proclaiming "I could get out of high school now!"

Learning to Cope

Regardless of her illness and mental and physical fatigue, Madison learned that silence about feelings affected her self-worth. She understood that she needed to connect with someone she could trust in order to start the process of healing. She found that trusted person in an older cousin. Madison knew how her father's criminal life and his behavior at home made her feel. She also knew that she would never turn to crime or get mixed up with criminals. She explained:

> When I have kids, I don't want them to go through that. I don't want my kids to have to feel the way I felt. I want their parents to be there for them. We understand Mommy has to work but Mommy can also come home and take care of her own kids.

Madison used the trauma and drama entrenched in her life as the fuel to propel her. She understood that her younger brothers were watching, and she had no intention of giving them an excuse to fail in school. She didn't want them to suffer unnecessarily because they followed her pattern of negative behavior in high school. She wanted her turnaround to be so powerful in spite of the hardship and emotional stress that they would see the wisdom in completing high school in 4 years and going on to college. So her subtle message was "Don't stay home."

Due to her complex journey in adapting and learning how to become successful, Madison felt the need to encourage any child of an incarcerated parent to try to endure the situation. That is what she did. With her mother's help, she also found a church, a place to rejuvenate her spirit. She suggested prayer as a balm for getting that better life.

Madison admitted that the children of the incarcerated need not embrace religion, but they should consider praying to "God or whoever they call up there."

She now finds herself longing for her father. In spite of everything, Madison longed for the return of her father to the family fold. She still holds out hope for having a "normal family" that can be together and experience a father who is always there. If this could happen, there would never be a need for her to continue to be a parent to her brothers.

Resilience and Successes

Although it is true that Madison's mother neglected her children in many ways and left Madison to become a surrogate parent, Madison still considers her mother to be one of her heroes. She watched her mother return to school and become a licensed practical nurse. She also watched her go through the bad things with her father and conquer her fear. When they became older, Madison and her siblings insisted on helping out financially out of gratitude to their mother for having endured and found her own successful path to happiness. They took over payment of bills so that no longer would there be a reason for their mother's economical survival to hinge on those two or three jobs that she held for many years. She had done the best that she knew how to do to provide for them. Madison figured that if her mother could make it when she had so much stacked against her, then Madison knew for sure that she, too, could make it.

Madison considers her successes to be the completion of high school, her entrance into college life, and her job. She even accepts working at the tender age of 13 a success because she didn't quit. Over the years, as she matured, Madison has held many jobs. For instance, she used to work at summer camps, where she took her little brothers with her.

Today, she beams with pride over those two boys. Madison shared her reasons by saying, "They didn't get locked up. They didn't go to jail. They finished high school. My youngest brother is about to graduate. He's number six in the state for track. He's doing really well. They're doing really good."

Madison knows that she had something to do with the positive outcome of her two younger brothers. But she gives credit to them for excelling and staying away from anything remotely connected to her father. They, too, are her heroes, along with her grandmother and her sister. She admits that she turned out just fine, too. She has done her job; she showed her brothers the way and then made sure that they would follow her actions and commit to memory the affirmation "if I can get through it, they can get through it."

It's no surprise that Madison holds her family in high esteem. She has learned very well to "just to be there no matter what for my family or anybody that needs somebody to be there for them." Her emotional problems of the past linger because they taught her lessons of survival. When she was 16, she had allowed her father to affect her in a significant way. She stopped combing her hair and simply stopped caring—all because he had been locked up for 6 years and had been out for 2 and then returned to prison once again. She had fixated on his troubled life and allowed it to damage her in such a way that she became paralyzed. But through her high-school success, she found a way to recover.

Madison now advocates for the unknown children of prisoners. She insists that researcher-scholars and anyone else who deals with such children must understand that

parents have not grasped the complexity of their children's lives due to a parent's incarceration:

> I don't think there would be so many parents incarcerated if parents understood how the children feel. If they really realized what they're doing to the kids and how they make these kids grow up with all these emotional problems and some take it out physically. I don't think that there would be a lot of incarceration if they really understood.

Madison's memories took her back to the source of so much anguish: her father. She recognizes that her family is no longer held hostage by her father. He is alone now, out of prison, and he has lost his family. His most loyal companion, her mother, left him. He has nowhere to go. He cannot go near her mother's house anymore. Madison will not take him in but when she does see him she is reminded of all his criminal indiscretions. She's never told him, however, how much pain she felt during her childhood due to him.

Daniel: I Broke the Cycle of Hurt

Introduction

Daniel is 22 years old and he remains a resident of his birth state on the East Coast of the United States. His experiences have sharpened his desire for service. Daniel's recent action of temporarily withdrawing from college to become a full-time caregiver to his old pastor is a testimony to his character. Daniel explained his unusual step of faith:

> At this time, I'm living with my 83-year-old pastor. He lost his wife almost 2 years ago after 65 years of marriage. I felt the need to go over and assist him. He was having some [physical and mental] health problems. I guess the compassion and the love that God put in my heart for him, made me feel the need to go. He needed someone.

Daniel considers his sacrifice minuscule because he is young and has time to achieve his dreams. He will return to school. In the meantime, he lives a full life. He is a

multitalented musician and considers it is duty to serve his church and his community through prison ministry.

Daniel is the eldest of three children. His mother and father are married. However, Daniel's father repeatedly committed crimes and went to prison during Daniel's childhood. As a result, Daniel grew up in great pain and suffered in silence. Under the tutelage of his mother, he learned to keep his feelings hidden and their neighbors guessing about the family's true circumstances. Daniel was burdened early on with adult issues and responsibilities, and if it weren't for an uncle and his beloved grandmother, he could have been lost to the streets.

Since 2003, Daniel's father has remained on the outside and struggles to find honest work. Daniel struggles, too, even now, with the knowledge that his life might have been different had he had a different father. He has been profoundly affected by the stench of prison. His father brought prison life into his world, but Daniel has determined the way he himself would go. In his pre-interview, Daniel considered the question of why he didn't end up in prison like his father. He readily answered that he was too ashamed, too embarrassed to ever consider following in that "negative direction." Furthermore, Daniel's thoughts turned to the importance of holding on to something positive, and he has embraced godly virtues, living by them as a way of lessening the sting of parental incarceration.

Navigating Family/Social Challenges

Daniel found out at an early age that his family had challenges unique to them. At 8 years old, he was visiting prison. He had to accept the news from his mother like a man. He also had to absorb the knowledge that his father was a felon and had to visit him at

least twice a month. His mother was adamant about her children showing their father respect. She was being unreasonable, but at that tender age, Daniel didn't know it. He was just a little boy struggling to live without his father.

It became common for Daniel's father to be in prison. He was in and out at first; then, at one point, he did a long stretch of 5 years. When he was placed a vast distance away in an unfamiliar part of the state, Daniel's mother found a way to drag her children to the prison. It was a hardship; however, Daniel and his siblings continued to visit. In those early years, Daniel's life was restricted to fulfilling the desire of his mother by spending all his free time traveling to different prisons to visit his father. There Daniel witnessed the same scene of his mother assuring his father of her loyalty.

Daniel hated those visits. He recalled the 2- or 3-hour drives and the utter discomfort of being treated as though he was the prisoner. He had to remove his jacket, shirt, and shoes. Sometimes he and his siblings were stamped on their hands as an identifier when exiting the prison. Although he hadn't committed a crime, he felt shame overwhelm him. He was the son of a prisoner. At home he was told that he had to be the man of the house, but he wanted to be a child. His words said it best: "I was never really a child. You want to be a child. You don't want to be a father and be older than I was supposed to be." He was only 8 or 9 years old, yet he was aware of those collect calls from his father:

> Once a week, if not once a week, every other week. . . . sometimes we would be in church, so he called whenever he could get us. I just remember that time I spoke to him. He told me how to be a man of the house because he was away and [me] being the eldest, he wanted me to just look after my brother and sister and be responsible while he was away. My response was okay but I didn't understand what he meant by that. All I thought was just to look after my brother and sister. . . . look after my mom and help her out.

And still the prison visits continued until Daniel was about 14 or 15 years old. Sometime during that period, his father was released and returned home.

Ever since Daniel was a preschooler, his father held no permanent place in his home life and it was reflected in the way Daniel felt about their relationship or lack thereof. His father had no clue of how Daniel fared through his early developmental stages. He was never around. As Daniel grew, he had negative feelings from the issues arising due to the imprisonment. He didn't know the crimes his father committed, but he did know that he didn't want to be compared to his father. Daniel heard the talk and responded this way:

> That time was a very crucial, sensitive, and important time of my life. That stage, I believe is getting to know and understand the person because, yes I was 3, 4, 5, but I really didn't know my father that well. It was silence to the extent of the negative place that he was in but it didn't stop people from saying, oh, you walk just like your dad, or you look like your dad. Sometimes, they would tell me funny things that may have happened in dad's childhood or things that I might do look similar to what he may have done in his childhood. He was in prison . . . some things I didn't want to hear.

Although his father spent an enormous amount of time in prison, Daniel eventually felt his presence in his life. His father lived with them off and on. Daniel confessed that during those short periods, he feared his father but he concealed it. His father was known for spanking his children the few times that he was home. He called it discipline, but Daniel called it scaring your children into obeying. His mother didn't intercede because she relished having his father home. However, the household changed when he was there. It filled with the shadow of imprisonment and thereby created a negative atmosphere. Daniel realized that he was uncomfortable and ashamed; he had a shaky relationship at best with his father.

Those days, Daniel felt "incomplete" because he had no father. But he had his maternal grandmother. She was the driving force behind building his character. She modeled what she expected from her grandchildren. Daniel's mother worked far from home, and she had to be on the job very early each morning. She wanted her children to go to school in their grandmother's school district so that they could take advantage of a better quality education. Thus began the shuttling between two homes and the long drives every day for the children.

Daniel's grandmother became the sole custodian of the three children. They were always at her house. She was, indeed, the mother away from home. Every day, they did their homework there and ate supper with her. By then, he knew that he was a troubled youth in many ways. Daniel's mental struggles were mostly caused by his mother prohibiting him from talking openly about his father's multiple incarcerations. He felt that he could have exploded from all the feelings that he kept "bottled up." He developed trust issues, which also included his mother. But he made an exception: his grandmother. Daniel trusted her. She spoiled him and his siblings yet guided them with a gentle hand. Daniel responded positively to this kind of nurturing. By contrast, he was beginning to fixate on death and sometimes conversed about the subject with his mother:

> I didn't like death and funerals. I told my own mother, I was scared of funerals. I told her I would never come to a funeral. She asked me about my grandmother, I said Yeah, I'll go to her funeral. The bond I had with my grandmother. . . . I was appreciative because of the love I had for her.

Daniel's mother managed to keep her children all together, thanks to the constant help from her mother. Keeping up appearances meant a lot to Daniel's mother, so she never spoke one negative word against her husband. She made it her business to say to

her children "That's your father; you have to respect him. Regardless of the state that he's in, you still respect your father."

Despite all the attention she gave to her husband, she invested equal time and effort in Daniel and his siblings' academic lives. She was overly concerned about their schooling. She wanted them to "make something" out of themselves. She wanted her children to have a better life than she had. She didn't want them to struggle the same way that she had to struggle. She wanted more for them. She wanted Daniel and his siblings to experience college life and become successful. She had Daniel when she was 17 years of age, and with his birth and her husband's convictions and incarcerations, her ability to fulfill her dreams became impossible.

In Daniel's home, his mother also stressed the importance of attending church, and she left no room for play or any other secular extracurricular activities. Daniel recalled his world at the time:

> All through my life, my mom has kept us in church—me, my brother and my sister. My mom was Muslim and my father was actually brought up in a Christian home all his life. . . . He met my mother, she converted to Christianity and after they were married, she got into religion. . . . She raised us in the church. So that is all we know and I would say from being young up into my age now, being in the church was what really kept us on the straight and narrow. The same structure we got at home was the same structure we got at church.

Nevertheless, life was a struggle within the household. Daniel's mother worked hard for stability—that's why she held firmly to the church—but financially she was drowning. Daniel surmised that from time to time, his grandmother and other family members would supply food and clothes for him and his siblings. As a family, they had no choice but to live with less of everything. His father, constantly in prison, was no financial help to the family's economic woes.

Another caregiver problem existed because there was no money to pay for babysitter services. Daniel's mother wanted to further her education, and thereby make life better for her children. She had graduated from high school and had taken a computer training class, but she needed more education. So many times she needed her husband to be there. To return to school, she needed him to look after their children, but he was locked up as usual and couldn't be of any assistance. Daniel watched his family's lives unfold in silence.

School Life

Daniel entered elementary school without a father figure in his life because his father was in prison. He had to conceal this fact from others outside of his family. His mother insisted that he tell no one. As he moved through the elementary years, Daniel had to respond to inquiries about his father by simply saying "None of your business." He found that he was "embarrassed and shameful." He was never to share any information about his family's home life with his teachers. However, his mother pushed him to perform well at school.

When Daniel was 6 years old, a teacher tried to have him classified as having attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) because he seemed to have a short attention span, but unbeknownst to her, he was trying to handle so much. His behavior had nothing to do with his abilities and everything to do with his incarcerated father and the demand from his mother to keep his father's secret. His mother promptly removed him from the school and enrolled him in a different school. Although Daniel performed well academically, his mother continued to remind him to focus more on his

responsibility as a student and do the things he needed to do. Daniel didn't socialize with teachers until he reached high school.

Daniel had very good grades from middle school through his last year in high school. His mother's personal struggle to take care of them fueled her desire to see Daniel excel. She continued to push. In high school, Daniel spent his days being quite busy. He considered high school "not bad at all." Over the years, he found that he connected with some teachers:

> My music teachers took interest in me because they knew the talent that I had as far as singing and playing. I say that it's a gift from God because my family is known for their musical abilities growing up. . . . My father himself plays the piano, drums, bass guitar, saxophone. . . . I sing, I play the piano, the drums and the bass guitar. I play by ear. I don't know how to read music. I just learned in my twelfth grade year . . . how to read notes. I didn't do well because I didn't stick to it. I was so advanced with hearing. It was hard to break down and excel at reading.

Nevertheless, Daniel's music gave him pleasure and freedom from his daunting life. He moved through classes with ease but found that his peers and others thought he was antisocial. His not taking part in extracurricular activities had a lot to do with the fostering of this perception. Daniel never put himself in a situation where he could be asked personal questions. He told no one in high school that his father was in prison.

He lived with shame about his situation. Sometimes he was forced to face his discomfort as an observer. When other students and their parents would come to school for a program, Daniel would focus on the fathers. He had no father to accompany him, and he envied those classmates' lives. He had his mother, but it wasn't the same, and there were those occasions when he was asked "Where is your father?" or "Is your father coming?" He would answer "No." Daniel would hurt because once again, he had to address how he felt, and it always was the same feeling: "incomplete."

In spite of those awkward moments, Daniel thrived. Today, he admits that some of his friends are still in the dark about his father's criminal record. His father is out of prison and accepted back in the family by his mother. But Daniel is determined that they will know the truth only if his father is willing to share such sensitive information with them.

Learning to Cope

Daniel had the burden of remaining silent about incarceration, and this affected his normal growth. He was still harboring thoughts of embarrassment even though he was trying to stay on a positive path. He felt that he carried a negative "mark" on him. His mother was the one who actually required his cooperation in the matter concerning his father. So he was surprised to hear her say that she, too, considered him secretive and antisocial. He justified his long-standing behavior:

> I'm secretive because I was taught to be secretive at a young age and to be wise in learning. I was taught to avoid certain questions and see how I can get out of things and try to be an adult at age 8 or 9. I guess it does affect my decision-making. I was told by my own mother whatever goes on in the house stays in the house. . . . Today, some of the things mentally I experienced. . . . I was wrestling with different emotions and the different thoughts. . . . How I stayed sane, how I didn't follow into the same trap, the same thing as my father. . . . it was God.

The difficulty of his childhood was a strong reminder to Daniel that even with the multiple times his father disappeared for long and short stretches of time, Daniel finally managed to find help. He found a strong faith. He also deeply admired his uncle—a father figure for him and the one who took him to school so many mornings. His admiration for this uncle transcended the silent rule. He had to trust somebody. It wasn't all right to remain quiet. To feel better, he needed to break the silence and talk. Daniel

accepted his guidance, along with the parenting of his mother and grandmother. This was his support system.

Resilience and Successes

Daniel's resilience can be seen in his ability to love people and serve gladly those who need him the most. He has conquered his fears. He attributes his successful passage into manhood to God, his mother, his uncle, and his grandmother. Each one gave him different things at different times in his life. Daniel's successes are many, and he is proud to say that he counts his achievements in high school and his graduating as the catalysts that gave him the confidence not only to enter college in 2006 but to achieve. Another success for him is the development of his musical talent, which has allowed him to participate in concerts at various venues. He won a metal for best vocalist in an NAACP program that searched for best musicians in his state. He is involved with Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). He also volunteers at soup kitchens to feed the hungry.

The motivators for determining the course of action for his life was his mother's relentless push for him to succeed and her economic struggle, as well as his father's disregard for the law and his multiple imprisonments. Daniel didn't want to go to jail:

> It affected me and my brother but not so much my sister because around her birth, 1995, my father went to prison. It was a long stretch. She was five when he came into her life. She treated him different; lenient. It taught me though that prison experience, I don't want to commit anything like that because, not only is my father in prison but the family is suffering. If I was to have children, I want to be able to be in their lives, to give them what they need.

Daniel credits the church for its positive life teachings. He learned from spiritual leaders how to treat the opposite sex and how children must behave in the home and in the community. In the prism of his world, he was encouraged and prodded to strive for

excellence in whatever he did, to bear witness to his faith, and to keep God as the focal presence in his daily life.

If Daniel had the opportunity to speak to other children like him who are experiencing parental incarceration, he would envision speaking boldly to them. He believes that the tendency to label them will come but that they must fight against it. Daniel stated:

> It is easy to indulge in thoughts that will cause you to believe that you must choose criminality like your parents; refrain. Gather around you for protection, those people who will inspire you to "move in a good direction." If you allow yourself to hang around those people who will often tell you that you will not amount to anything that will be "your downfall." Stay away and give yourself a chance to move forward with "a clear mind."

Daniel believed he was helped by God to have a "clear mind and keep going forward." He advised exhibiting boldness as a reminder of how important good choices are in selecting positive people in one's life:

> Don't participate in gang activity. They won't love you. They will kill you if you try to get out. Don't allow people in your presence to talk about your parents. You don't want new seeds of discord or negative feelings to be planted in your mind against the incarcerated parent. Always forgive . . . take hurt, flip it and don't pass [it] on to other people. Break the cycle of hurt. Try to give people what you didn't get.

Daniel had to learn to protect himself and felt that he had passed through the bad periods of his own life and could now give advice. He tends to be analytical in his thinking and is cautious in his actions. He keeps in his mind the fact that he never wants to disappoint his mother, and he prefers to keep trouble at bay. Lessons about his father's incarcerations have produced positive alternatives for Daniel's life. He accepts the mentoring by his uncle and his own place in his pastor's house as part of a divine plan.

Daniel views himself as being blessed, and he is pleased to be counted among the living. He likes how he turned out. His words are not puffed up to make himself special; just thankful:

> I am glad I am not among the dead. I could name a person every year who had died. I know how many people have been shot. I'm glad I wasn't in the gangs . . . I didn't have children out of wedlock. My mother didn't want that for us. I'm glad I had not fallen.

Daniel still harbors insecurities of his past inspite of his progress. The verbal abuse from his father impacted him greatly. He is adamant about that kind of negative behavior not becoming a generational curse. It has to be broken. It must stop with him. He is working on himself as a person. Daniel wants so much to be successful in life in what the future holds for him. Therefore, he is ambitious enough to know that he must do what is right in order for him to be able to serve others well.

He would like research scholars and educational practitioners to understand that they should not be biased. As he surmised, "There is always an ugly duckling, there's always a black sheep. Everybody's situation is not the same. Have a more open mind to some positive things out there in the dark, gloomy world. God does so many different things." Daniel is hopeful because he knows that he has not as yet accomplished all that he has in mind for himself. But he is on his way.

Summary

This chapter seeks to identify gaps in both the formal, professional, academic knowledge, and understanding of children who are left behind by parents who are removed from society because of their criminal habits. These children can be described as an under-researched group, living among society without adequate data indicating either

their numbers or locations. Chapter 4 acknowledges 12 African-American young adults who offer their personal stories as a qualitative means to close the gap of knowledge about this population. Individually, each participant recounts and describes, through the interview process, the challenges they had to face as children because their lives became chaotic, abnormal, and traumatic due to their fathers'—and in one case, a mother's—incarceration. The young people described how they managed to cope, hold on to dreams, and eventually thrive under harsh conditions. Their stories provide a source of reference for the findings that are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter aggregates the data collected and the significant features of the 12 individual cases. The multiple-case-study method permits cross-case comparisons, thus strengthening the research. This cross-case analysis focused on the actual worlds of the participants. My role as the researcher was to provide the linkage across the cases. The background of the participants surfaced as an important common element that permits cross-case comparison. Table 2 presents the names of the 12 participants, their ages, family structures, gender of the incarcerated parents, and participants' education status.

All participants have had a father incarcerated except for David, who had both parents in the criminal justice system during childhood. Nine participants are in college, two are waiting to enter college, and one is working at a trade.

In this chapter, a series of related subsections is explored, each of which helps to answer the research questions: How do African-American young adults (18 years and older) describe the impact of parental incarceration on their lives? and How were they able to overcome the difficult situation and graduate from high school?

Table 2

Background Categories

Name	Age	Family Structure	Incarcerated Parent	H.S. Graduate/ Add. Education
David	18	Maternal grandmother, eldest child, two siblings	Father and Mother	Waits to enter college this fall
Joyce	18	Mother, two siblings	Father	Some college / employed
April	21	Mother, middle of two siblings	Father	Third-year college student
Leon	20	Mother, middle of two siblings	Father	No college Works at Home Depot
Rachel	19	Mother, middle of two siblings	Father	Associate's degree and is attending college to finish her education
Alice	21	Mother, brother, half-brother who comes around	Father	College student
Joel	20	Mother, lived with one of his seven siblings	Father	College student
Tilda	21	Mother, never lived with six siblings	Father	Accepted into county college
Millie	19	Mother, younger brother, five half-brothers and -sisters	Father	College student
Mason	27	Mother, seven siblings, didn't live with two, lived on his own for 3 years	Father	Some college Currently works in construction
Madison	25	Mother, five siblings	Father	College student
Daniel	22	Mother, eldest child, two siblings	Father	Temporarily withdrew from college

The social problem of this study is addressed here, showing the underlying central issues during childhood through the words of participants who make up the 12 cases. By looking at the different perspectives, this section takes the technical process of the cross-case analysis and takes it beyond the patterns and themes and gives it a fresh twist by allowing the individual cases to unfold naturally so that what follows is a clear, precise picture of the family, the community, and the individual participant.

The Family: Fractured but Not Broken

The Telling

All of the participants discussed how they were told about their parents' imprisonment. All but two participants were between the ages of 5 and 8 years old—the others were older—when they were informed of the imprisonment. The telling was a significant event with them because they remembered how the news instantly affected them. They had to face the unsettling changes made to their lives that came with the telling, whether those changes were small or enormous. This section is called "The Telling" in order to depict that poignant moment in the lives of the young people. For most, it was a single event; for others it became part of a series of responses from family members. A common thread was the secrecy leading up to the telling.

Joyce expressed that her life was strange because her mother often threw out her father before the point at which she told her that his frequent absence was because he was serving time in prison. April also noticed that her father was absent quite a lot from her life before her grandmother told her that he had been in prison and that he was returning to a federal facility once again for a very long time.

Leon was told by his mother. But he had noticed small changes in his house, even beginning to make her constantly unhappy:

> I think I noticed that my dad wasn't there when my mom started sending us to my grandmother's house for school. She would go in a corner and cry. I knew that it was hard on her because she kept crying. I didn't understand why she was crying. I thought it was because we went to church and she might be getting a blessing.

Alice's mother told her. Alice was of pre-school age when her father disappeared from her life. Nothing was said to her until much later. The truth about his whereabouts was never spoken because of Alice's strong attachment to her father. As a little girl, she had voiced her feeling that her father could "do no wrong," and so her mother kept silent until Alice was older.

Joel's mother held onto the secret because his father had been in prison from his birth. Joel noticed the absence but said nothing. One day, his mother and other family members told him where his father was. As for Daniel, he was told by his mother after the long absence of his father. His family had always linked him to his father by his appearance or even his walk, but never was there a mention of his father's whereabouts. Out of a desire for him to respect his father, his mother cushioned the manner of the telling because she wanted him to respect his father although he was in prison.

Mason and Tilda were told by their mothers that their fathers were in prison. What made the timing of the telling unusual was that both were 5 years old, the youngest recorded age of the 12 young people. Because of their young age, they had little understanding of what was told to them.

For Rachel, David, Millie, and Madison, mothers and family members had actively hidden all or parts of the information from them. The four children were given a series of responses that misled them.

Rachel was told by her mother. But it happened over a long period of time, after a lot of prodding by Rachel because her father was a stranger to her and she was curious. Her mother's reluctance to tell her that he was in prison was reflected in her answers over time. Even when her mother told her, she played down the seriousness of his crime and said, "He is just in jail for a little bit of time, here and there. She was telling me that he was in prison for like child support and stuff." At the time, Rachel had no idea how difficult life would be because she was never told the whole story, as her mother kept so many things private or a secret.

For several years David heard muted and repeated references to a dad that he didn't know. The extended family's chatter seemed to always be directed toward him, yet there was never a direct spoken connection made between him and his dad. There seemed to be some secret about his dad. Finally, his cousins, aunts, and grandmother explained that his father was behind bars.

Millie simply said that she was "a daddy's girl. I loved him." She became aware that he no longer was in her home, and so she asked questions. Her mother first told her "He's away right now and he'll be back." Time went by before her mother told her the truth.

Madison said that for the longest time her mother told her that "we're going to visit your dad in college." For 4 years, her mother kept insisting that he was in "college." It was her questions and simple statement "This is not college" that brought the fabrication to an end. Madison's mother took her time to explain, but she eventually said, "Daddy did something he was not supposed to do, so now he has to pay." So, at 7 years old, Madison listened with interest to the information, and by the end of the speech, her

world was shattered and changed. She lost her childhood innocence forever. She lost her carefree spirit.

In summary, the telling was significant because it signaled further hardships and difficulties for each young adult. Their childhoods would never be the same. Parental incarceration would bring into their lives adult problems and challenges. Whether they were prepared or not, they faced lives that were changed forever.

The Reaction

Some individuals were quite young when they learned about their parents' incarceration; others were older. No matter their age, all of them had struggles with coping and understanding their new reality. The news brought added stress to each one; and to a few, confusion. Leon, Joel, and Tilda felt sentenced, too, and this feeling made their lives even more difficult. Rachel was simply confused. Leon allowed his mother to see that he was upset, and he openly announced that he had a "dysfunctional family." He was miserable and embarrassed. He remembered adding "I didn't need him." Tilda vividly recalled that "everything was out of whack. I didn't know whether I was going or coming." Joel remembered his reaction. He walked outdoors and physically exhausted himself with play to forget his "whole situation." He needed to feel "free" and that feeling only came when he was physically active. He internalized his feelings. Rachel remembered that "it wasn't sad but I wasn't overjoyed, either." Her father was a stranger. She recalled that her confusion lay in her mother's actions of swiftly removing her from everything familiar and planting her in a new location across the state. It took a while to figure out that it was because of her father's incarceration.

The responses to the news of paternal incarceration were intricately related to the context of the young adults' lives at the time, and the complex problems that followed were related to this one event. What was common among the 12 was that they all had a reaction to the news of their parents' incarceration. There was no ugliness from them in words or deeds. For example, David kept quiet and wondered about the man most people called his father. Joyce internalized her situation so much that by the seventh grade she was in a depressed state. April refused to focus on the bad. She said, "I didn't shut down; I smiled." Their responses to the news depicted their age and gender differences.

Those who were very young had very little understanding about what had been told to them. Mason explained how much age mattered by recalling his own experience. He initially reacted by not reacting overtly or emotionally to the news of his father being incarcerated. He remarked that he visited his father right after the news. About the experience, he said, "It wasn't bad. I just remember walking through prison, walking through the metal detector and going to a back area." Eventually, he did feel vulnerable, and he attributed the feeling to his father's imprisonment. He remembers the hurt feelings and the resentment because he realized that his father wouldn't be there for him when he needed male guidance.

More than half of the participants felt lonely and were admonished to keep silent about their father. In David's case, with both parents absent from his life, he had identity problems. The news that confirmed that he was a child of prisoners simply caused him to feel abandoned, conflicted, and confused. He also felt so helpless because he couldn't fix what interrupted his life. He wrestled with his feelings and eventually gave in to them. The result was a bad temper for a short time. As a young boy, he never felt connected

enough to adults to share his true feelings. In his mind, he asked himself, “Why can’t they be in my life? Why can’t I have my parents?”

Rachel explained that her initial reaction was “a feeling of vacancy for the father figure.” But her life didn’t stop. She shared that “it was just something I had to get over.” Daniel had an almost similar reaction to Rachel’s. He felt “incomplete” because at the moment of the telling of his father’s incarceration, he felt that he had no father. He actually said, “There were some things I didn’t want to hear.” He shared that he felt ashamed.

Tilda became confused and felt quite alone. She felt abandoned by both parents; her mother was no longer the custodial parent, and her father got himself locked up. She felt betrayed by them and felt a little foolish because she had believed for years that he was just away. She had difficulty describing the excruciating pain of having no one to read bedtime stories to her or simply tuck her into bed.

Joel initially reacted by internalizing the bad news and showed no outward sign of distress. But he was very upset about this turn of events and quietly withdrew from people because trust was part of what he lost after his childhood had been altered by his father’s actions.

Alice reacted by dismissing the reality of her situation. She would allow herself to accept what her mother told her about the father she cherished. She stubbornly remained loyal to the myth of a perfect father. As much as she felt the negative undercurrent that permeated throughout her home, she would admit that she felt shame. She struggled in her pretend world. She explained her behavior after the news: “I used to tell myself what

my mother was saying about him being incarcerated wasn't true—just anything to get myself out of this place."

Leon was upset, and he wasn't afraid to show how much he was affected by such bad news about his father. He remembers feeling a surge of resentment that stayed with him. When his mother took him to visit his father, he refused to acknowledge him at the prison. He shared that his thoughts lingered over his feelings of betrayal. He lamented about how he had to suddenly give up his carefree childhood, and that sacrifice made him scared.

Millie initially thought that she had no reason to feel insecure after she heard the news about her father's incarceration. She didn't react emotionally because she thought that her mother's presence was enough, but she was hurt by her father. They were close, and so resentment took root because of the mandatory separation that he caused. She mourned over the loss of their closeness as she realized that she was drifting away emotionally from him.

Madison's reaction came from deep hurt and resentment as she faced the reality of her situation. She expressed her displeasure in simple words: "My dad was never there." Madison had been cheated out of the daily interaction with her father in her home for a long time. She had been misled by her mother, and this blow brought forth a truth that she had to live with. Her distaste for her father's drunken lifestyle is reflected in the words she chose to sum up her plight: "He'd rather have the streets than build a relationship with me."

Joyce reacted with great anxiety after being told the news that her father was incarcerated. She immediately became extremely nervous because she feared his release.

He was trouble, and she wanted him to stay in prison so the family could be spared the drama that came with his involvement with drugs.

Upon hearing the news of her father being locked up, April reacted by fretting. She already had bad memories due to him. She was scared because he was a violent man, and she preferred that he stay away. Prison brought new problems and compounded old ones for her family. She lamented, "The only thing I worried about was money. I knew my mother would have to take care of everything."

April also demanded no answers about the new problem from her mother; instead, she tried to be a good daughter.

Too many of them were exposed to the prisons' frightening policies that made them feel like prisoners themselves. The hardships connected to the long drives and poor inmate behavior led to additional trauma for the children because they saw things that were damaging to their development.

The glass partitions, the shirt and shoe removals, the frisks, the standing alone to be scanned at such young ages also caused them much embarrassment and discomfort. Joel shut down emotionally. Millie questioned authority and said, "I never want to get in trouble." Daniel felt shame, especially when he was stamped. Leon was just simply upset and reacted in an angry, resentful manner and explained that "I didn't pay him [father] any mind."

In summary, all of the young people were connected by the one event of parental incarceration as well as the fact that they all reacted in ways that fit their personalities. Each person had the character and experience that helped him or her to overcome their emotional and physical difficulties.

The Downward Spiral

All 12 participants were exposed to criminal activities to some extent. In some cases, the father was totally responsible for the family's downward spiral. The majority of the children had little or no relationship with their fathers. Day-to-day life had to continue without the parent's presence. Children tended to experience conflicted emotions during those periods when their fathers returned to their communities.

April recalled those periods when her father was free. He came home, and she would hear his empty promise "I'm going to do better," but she would soon witness his repeated beatings of her mother. April's household would go into turmoil, and everything would be out of control. The violent scenes were so awful that she ended up retreating to her room for safety and escape. What made life even worse was that she kept silent about what her father was doing to her mother. She even kept this awful truth from her grandmother. As she put it, "It's just my grandmother but I didn't like her to know." But, the silence about such violence in her home affected April greatly. She really wanted a different life. The sad part was that her father remained a violent and very aggressive person.

Prior to Joyce's father's incarceration, he never lived with the family. Joyce's anxiety heightened because he brought back into their lives not only the illegal drug world but also an aggressiveness that frightened her immensely. He was trouble. By the time Joyce was an adolescent, her father threatened to take her away. The threat was real enough, and she remembered how scared she felt: "I got scared and then he couldn't come around anymore." Joyce acutely felt the spiraling downward trend of her family when her brother and sister were incarcerated, too. Her great fear was that members

within the community would turn from her because of their perception of her family. She wanted a normal life.

Madison was one of those study participants who saw her father arrested in her house when she was a little girl. She was so traumatized that day that the scene remains with her. She watched police officers ransack her home, and it was her father's fault. The actions of all involved frightened her. Madison explained that her father was violent and often lashed out at the family. Often when he was free, he didn't come home. Those occasions when he did come home, he was drunk, and the family always faced violent scenes because no one was able to prevent his outbursts. During those times, Madison lived in fear and her family was in a downward spiral. She longed for normalcy.

In contrast, Leon's father one day disappeared out of his life. Leon eventually became aware of the unhappiness permeating his household. The changes were unsettling and perplexing: his mother's constant crying, his daily shuttling between his home and his grandmother's house, and the noticeable activity of his mother as she changed her role to being both father and mother to him. All was done without a word spoken.

Tilda had to live a very complex life. Her mother abandoned her and left her with her grandparents. Her father was a multiple felon. She had no mother or father as a constant presence in her life, and so many times she felt her life spiraling downward. Her tough circumstances were caused by her father because he was not there when she needed him. She couldn't turn to extended family for help because many of them were drug addicts and/or were on welfare, and they, too, needed help. She just had a life full of difficulties and stressful situations that were out of her control.

Alice and Rachel had one thing in common: poverty that deepened when their fathers were imprisoned. The lack of finances and male support in the home accelerated the downward spiral of each girl's family. As Alice's home life became more unstable, she felt socially isolated and abnormal compared to her peers who weren't experiencing fathers away in prison:

> I moved three times; me and my younger brother had to sleep in the same bed and this happened until I was 17. So as I grew up, it really hurt me because I felt I was ashamed to invite people over. I really couldn't have friends because I was so ashamed.

The sense of shame deepened for Alice when her father robbed them of the few material possessions in their home. The chaos and the struggles she experienced were so acute for her because her father was in and out of her life. Like Madison, she, too, wished for normalcy.

Rachel had a very private single mother who obsessed over the possibility that the neighbors might find out that Rachel's father was in prison, so she moved her family many miles away from their original residence. As much as Rachel's father was a stranger to her, this abrupt move accelerated the downward spiral that was set in motion by his arrest and incarceration. Rachel had additional worries because her father was also an alcoholic:

> We grew up so poor. It was hard times from then on. We lived in a shelter system; it affected me a lot. . . . You have curfews and if you broke your curfew, you got kicked out of the shelter so it was a lot of pressure. We didn't have transportation. My mom worked long hours.

Joel didn't acknowledge his struggle to anyone, and his father lived with him for a short time when he was between prison stays. Joel believed that he knew his father, and he chose to remain quiet. He did think to himself that "he must have been a real bad

man." Mason thought that his father was blind to the needs of the family. He saw his father as selfish and the affection he displayed toward Mason was more like that of a friend than a father.

In spite of all the incarcerated parental display of beatings, aggressive behaviors, drugs, drunken outbursts, thievery, and disappearance without a word, and their children's distain for the prison revolving-door existence of their incarcerated parents, the majority of the young people expressed how they longed for normalcy. This was a common sentiment, and the experiences generated from incarceration fostered their further desires for safety and escape from their dreadful lives, filled with too much stress.

Primary-Care Provider

Mothers and grandmothers were primary-care providers in each case. These women were faced with unprecedented odds, but they were resourceful enough to find ways to improve their lot. They carried heavy burdens and found it difficult to function well with the thought of the perceived stigma placed on them for having husbands, boyfriends, or sons-in-law in prisons or jails. They were weighed down with increased financial strain as well as physical and emotional stress, and they lacked the necessary resources that could otherwise be provided by those beyond their own extended families. The majority of the women felt that they couldn't stop the downward spiral. The majority of the mothers were the primary caregivers in the beginning. However, several of them looked for a temporary reprieve and believed the solution was to turn over daily childcare to their own mothers. They simply needed help. The reasons for this action varied. In some cases, it was because they worked long hours, and in other cases, it was best for their children because the mothers were struggling to make sense of their own lives and

couldn't cope with parenting alone. Whatever, the reason, grandmothers played an important role because they were willing to take over the role of parent.

Both the caregivers and children understood that paternal incarceration interrupted their lives negatively in various ways. Most of the children confessed that they became more alert to family issues after they were told the news.

In the majority of cases, the young people recollected they were aware that their custodial maternal parents and/or their surrogate grandmothers were overextended in their new roles. The young people saw them as good parents who did the best they could in bad situations. Several shared their thoughts about that period of their lives. They weren't comfortable remembering the hardships, which were many.

Rachel shared her life experience as a child living in extreme poverty with her mother, who depended on homeless shelters but had the courage to try to find a way to provide alternative living arrangements. She recalled how devastating it was to know that her mother's good intentions failed:

> The first place was a garage and it was tiny. We stayed in there for a couple of months and then the people said that we had to move out because they were going to bring in their grandmother . . . then my mom found another place and that was a basement. It was horrible. The heat was terrible. . . . no stove . . . we had a hot plate . . . a little toaster oven; just trying to make it work . . . trying not to go back into the shelter system. It seemed like once you got in there, there was no getting out. . . . It was just the bottom.

Alice hailed her mother as her hero, and she wasn't the only study participant to do so because of the struggles seen and conquered during childhood. Alice remarked that she was slow to understand her life as it unfolded around her because she had little understanding of how complex it truly was during that period. She was well aware that her mother hadn't given in to despair. Instead, she returned to school as she worked to

provide food and shelter for her two children. Alice noted that she played a part in her mother's successfully overcoming much hardship:

> At first I really didn't get it. I was 12 and I wound up having to learn to cook for me and my little brother because nights, she wasn't home. My mom was trying to better herself for our lives and I had to kind of grow up because my father wasn't there and my main focus was to try to help my mom . . . knowing that she went nights without eating because she wanted to make sure her kids ate and she wanted to make sure we stayed in private school.

Leon described his role as the eldest child as quite stressful. He was asked to be the man in the house at 9 years old. Not knowing what he was to do, he mentally struggled about his adult duties in his fatherless home due to his father's imprisonment:

> All I thought was just to look after my brother and sister . . . look after my mom and help her out . . . I didn't understand. . . .When mom was at work, grandma was home spoiling us. She was the mother away from home.

David felt the commitment of his grandmother, and he was grateful. By observing, he knew that she had little material resources to help her in caring for him, but she never complained. He summarized his relationship with her:

> Home lifestyle with my grandmother was all I needed. She did the best she could for me. She couldn't provide everything for me, she wanted to but I knew she was doing her best. My grandmother was all I had at the time. She supported me in anything I wanted to do. My grandmother loves me. . . . Some things your father will teach you or your mother would teach you. My grandma didn't always have the time or she never really knew much about it herself.

David expressed the difficulty in doing well for one's grandchildren and still not fulfilling all their needs. He only knew his grandmother as a parent, yet he felt the longing for his biological parents, especially his father, to teach him how to be a man. David confessed that he struggled with the longing, but in the end he knew that his grandmother worked feverishly to help him to understand his worth, and that was so positive.

All the young people noticed the struggle of their custodial mothers and/or grandmothers. Several remarked that they noticed abnormal or weird behavior exhibited by mothers who were the primary caretakers. For example, April's mother insisted that she smile away her troubles, even though she knew that she was asking a lot from her little girl. The violence perpetrated by April's father in the privacy of their home was ugly. April not only witnessed the beatings, she tried in vain to stop them, repeatedly. By contrast, Leon's mother cried all the time without saying a word, but Leon noticed that she, indeed, took on the role of both parents in the house, and that signaled to him that things had changed in his household.

Other young people expressed a lack of fully understanding their mothers' behaviors, including their reluctance to let go of their children's fathers. Some watched mothers go through the motions of holding on to a dream that would never come true. The young people expressed that they were aware of their mothers' longings. Some shared their experiences and the temporary effect that those horrible incidents had on them. Madison expressed devastation when her mother allowed her violent father back in their home and recalled that he would "mainly target" her and her brother. She remembered thinking to herself, "My own dad's trying to fight us and my mother."

Daniel shared that he eventually had trust issues with his mother because of the enormous effort that she made to protect his father and yet not be willing to listen to him, her son. Daniel felt that his mother wasn't sensitive to his feelings. He tried to talk to her about his father's repeated incarcerations, but she would only say, "That's your father; you have to respect him regardless of the state that he's in."

Millie's mother felt that it was her duty to make sure that her children understood that there were consequences for wrongdoing or, more to the point, criminal behavior. Her mother struggled to positively influence not only Millie and her younger brother but her husband's other children who actually lived with them from time to time. Millie reflected on how much of a difference her mother made on her own life because she cared so much for all the children. Parallel to what many others shared, Millie summed up her mother's lesson to her in a few words:

> She had a job. She took care of us, made sure that I had and provided for us and so if she could do it then, I could do it by myself without depending on other people. That's why I'm independent now. I learned from her.

In each of the cases, all 12 were very fortunate to have a mother and/or grandmother to care for them and to intervene on their behalf. Without intervention, the downward spiral of events would have wreaked havoc in all of their lives.

The Community: An Umbrella of Safety

In this study, the two primary forms of community support came from the church and the school. Both institutions provided steady positive supports that helped to foster connectedness, stability, and safety, thereby becoming critical to the young people's ability to successfully cope and adjust during the prolonged periods of parental incarceration.

Church Support

Over time, the church became a force in the children's lives as they grew into adulthood. From the very beginning of the added stress resulting from fathers being incarcerated numerous times, the church became the beacon of hope for the mothers and

children. The support became vital to survival within those communities. The families' struggles became tolerable because the church was there as an escape from their miserable, vexing lives. Through song and prayer, the mothers, grandmothers, and children could find relief.

Every young person reflected on the past events of childhood years, and some more than others emphasized their church involvement, but all emphasized the positive effect of spirituality as a driving force in their lives. Church was then and still is the anchor for them—the safe and secure place that helped to heal them and move them forward to a positive place. The majority of those children for whom church was a stabilizing influence credit their mothers and grandmothers because they introduced them to the church and made sure that they stayed connected to the spiritual environment. In fact, those young people admitted that they willingly turned to the church when they realized that it was a holy place where they felt safe and, for a while, the darkness in their lives could be snuffed out. It was a place where God used people to give hope. They readily spoke about their faith in God. For several, prayer was the key to their power within.

Mason summed up the spiritual connection this way:

> I had to learn to really get on my knees. . . . The experiences I have with God, helped me through. . . . I had to fully understand about God and who He was for me to get over and get through.

David reflected on his strong spiritual belief and the effect it had on his self-worth: "God is always by your side. God doesn't put too much on you that you cannot bear; trials and tribulations are neither excuses nor reasons for me to go out and want to hurt and do bad things."

Those young people find significance today in remembering that during their childhoods, they had mothers and grandmothers who were committed to finding a way to keep alive their religious fervor.

Joyce reflected that her mother set in motion habits that guaranteed that she would be involved in church activities early on and that such involvement was so good for her. Her family's religious life kept the scary thoughts at bay. Joyce remarked that when her mother got in a car accident, the church was there. She has never forgotten that Sunday morning: "I woke up and pretty much the whole church was in my house."

Leon presented a poignant observation that life without his father brought his family to the church. Because the spiritual nourishment kept them from falling apart, they practically lived there. During that period, the negative consequences of his father's incarceration diminished for long periods, and he remembers feeling so grateful. He said: "We always had the church that was helping. I played the drums, my older brother played piano, my sister followed behind me and my brother."

Rachel and her family lived a transitory lifestyle, and in their new community, Rachel felt alienated and quite out of place. Rachel gladly attended church because it became her escape from an awful life. The church support eventually enriched her life and gave her what she needed through caring individuals. Although she remembered the daily stress that seemed to engulf every facet of her life for a long time—even the good parts became part of the lingering problems—her church was a good part to which she clung to move herself forward:

> My pastor took [my father's] role when I was 5. I didn't know it then; I know it now so maybe that's why I didn't feel so left out because I had him. My mom was a single parent and he would help us out here and there. His wife would be kind enough to

help us too. He had kids so he treated me like a daughter and I was able to call him Pop.

Parallel to the feelings Rachel shared were those of many others. They thrived in the church. Daniel remembered his life being totally controlled by his mother. All free time was either spent traveling to different prisons to visit his father or living in the church. His mother cut out all secular play and led him to believe in the value of spiritual things:

> All through my life, my mom has kept us in church, me, my brother and my sister. My mom was Muslim and my father was actually brought up in a Christian home all his life. . . . He met my mother, she converted to Christianity and after they were married, she got into religion and she raised us in the church. So, that is all we know and I would say from being young up into my age now, being in the church was what really kept us on the straight and narrow. The same structure we got at home was the same structure we got at church.

Today, when Daniel looks back, he recognizes that he was aware that she was desperate because of deep financial woes, and so she needed the church life for stability for herself and for her children.

Others explained that their mothers were practicing Christians who made sure that the church was a meaningful support for themselves and their children. Daniel simply said that "one of the things that did help me was mom kept us in the church no matter what." The young people voiced that some of their mothers had a close relationship with their own mothers, who influenced their religious lives. April explained that she was aware of the close connection between her mother to her grandmother because when things were really bad at her home, she and her two siblings would be taken to her grandmother's home. Regardless of the circumstances, her grandmother would make sure that the whole family was in church. April recalled:

> We went to church every Sunday. We were in the choir. We did Bible study and the religious aspect had an effect on my life. Actually, it keeps you grounded and that was also something that kept me from doing things that other people were doing.

Mason readily admitted that he got through the challenging times by holding on to his Christian beliefs:

> Sometimes you feel you're the cause of why everything is happening but I learned to really get on my knees and the experiences I have with God, helped me through because I had to fully understand about God and who He was for me to get over and get through.

Today, he says that he never feels close enough to God but he glories in the realization that he didn't turn out like his father. He is tied so closely to the church that he quickly expressed that his desire is simply to be "a man of God."

The influences of the church gave these children a sense of belonging and safety. The church members tried to give the children what they needed without judgment. Their acceptance of the young people gave the children stability through the knowledge that they had places to go and share their troubles if they needed to do so. Some children had pastors and/or church members; others had extended-family church members or complete strangers in the church who gave them constant support.

School Support

For the most part, school was a safe place for the young people, a refuge from all of their troubles. Some individuals were slow to adapt and perform well, while others immediately grasped the importance of their academic performance. Some found that they had the ability to work productively with support from the schools through teachers, administrators, and peers. The environment stimulated them and made them intellectually curious. In one case, recognition was a stimulant. David remembered how his principal

singled him out in the hallways to give him a positive boost for his day. His principal's favorite motto remained with him: "Failure is not an option; it can be done." Over time, every one of the young people accepted the life lessons and/or nurturing they received from the school environment.

Within that environment, some of the young people's intense interest to learn caused a flurry of activity and teacher interest in them over time. The majority of the young people benefited from teachers investing much time and effort in them. The school environment also offered all of the young people rich experiences beyond the required classroom work. Some really took advantage of the opportunities, accepted the teacher support, and followed paths leading to satisfying their particular interest in such areas as the sciences and mathematics. The teachers encouraged the young people's quest for knowledge as well as their engagement in such external activities as participating in local academic competitions and traveling to Capitol Hill for civic lessons or to Costa Rica to hone their scientific skills. As they expanded energy and realized their dreams, they were never alone; they had advocates working on their behalf.

School offered another path of learning that some of the young people took advantage of and learned self-discipline in the process. This outlet displayed the musical talents of more than one young person. Playing the piano, drums, and/or bass guitar and dancing became sources of positive energy that helped a few to free themselves of negative thoughts and anxieties, and sense of loss of fathers to prisons. In Daniel's case, the music teachers used the love of music to build a relationship with one of the boys by fostering his interest. In nurturing him, they were able to elicit his cooperation to enhance his skills, including reading music.

Schoolteachers became community supports to the young people. They rallied around some who needed extra attention and academic guidance. They took them home, fed them, sat with them, and listened to their woes of home life, yet they managed to keep the children focused on performing well. They moved them forward. The children learned and began to appreciate their own abilities. Under their guidance, the children thrived and their attention focused on what their futures held for them.

Furthermore, the majority of mothers and grandmothers wanted the children to do well in school. Several mothers demonstrated fearlessness in becoming their children's voices. They were positive advocates who moved their children along by praising and nudging. They set a tone that was strong enough with their children to convey to them that school was the children's responsibility and that they needed to be committed to their own school tasks.

Mason was one of the children who experienced undue difficulty in high school, and he credits his mother for finding the correct school pathways to help him. When things went poorly in a school board meeting, Mason's mother had no fear of withdrawing him from the school and arranging to have him home schooled by a teacher from the very school he had left. Joyce's mother removed her and enrolled her in another high school out of the district in order to give her a better quality academic experience. Joyce relished the challenge and succeeded. Some mothers went to school meetings and made themselves known to the schools. Others reinforced messages of positive expectations to their children, and the children responded in positive ways, such as achieving high grade-point averages.

During their high-school years, students participated in school sports activities as healthy outlets to exercise their bodies as well as their minds. The team sports connected them with other students, thereby also satisfying their social and emotional needs. In most cases, they were willing to stretch themselves in order to experience the impact of positive people in their lives. Some individuals concentrated on this aspect of school life and excelled in it. Joel, the track and field runner; David, the self-taught sports enthusiast; and April, the faithful basketball, cross country, and softball team member, are examples of young people using sports as their way to commit to achievable goals through persistence.

School life became a critical component in the young people's search for coping mechanisms. Each young person began high school emotionally impeded by different feelings about the behaviors of their imprisoned fathers. What connected their stories so strongly was the fact that they had no open and direct conversation about their criminal fathers. Building trust with teachers took time, and some moved slower than others; most remained silent but managed to find a way to survive high school with little damage done to their self-image.

However, for some, school was a hostile place, and it was reflected in their interaction with their teachers. As Joel put it, "It happened all through high school, I was the dumbest, and teachers would tell me this. You're never going to do anything in your life that's worth anything." There were teachers who misunderstood the cries for help. Tilda, Alice, Madison and Mason are examples of students not getting the emotional support they needed. They had no idea of their emotional injury from the compounded effects of parental incarceration. Some teachers fought hard to have these children

labeled as having attention and concentration problems. Once labeled as special needs children, they were social misfits in White schools.

The young people feared that they were overlooked because they were not the popular students, at least in their minds. Some allowed themselves to fall victim to the mental and physical pressures of their home situations, leaving them to exhibit behaviors that denoted poor choices early in high school. Madison is a good example of allowing her heavy family burdens to affect her school life. By the time she reached high school, she was mentally and emotionally tired. Since the age of 9, she had been cooking, cleaning, and taking care of her young brothers as if she were their mother. Madison was highly intelligent but arrived at school each day despondent. It took caring teachers, a principal, and Madison's own will to succeed for her to accept that she was a survivor. She regained her self-esteem and blossomed under the watchful eyes of many people. When she had problems with a subject ("I couldn't pass math. . . . I had to go get help"), she and her principal figured that she needed help from night school, and so she enrolled and did well.

Moreover, there were some children who just felt different, and it didn't matter whether they attended a private elite school or a public school, the result was the same; their social interactions were painful. Each individual longed for an intact family, headed by a father. School functions involving families reminded them of what they were missing, and they felt hurt. Tilda was the example of the worst case. She felt abandoned by her mother as a toddler. She had been handed over to her grandparents without one word of explanation from anyone. Her mother never came back for her. Tilda struggled with confusion about where she fit in. She wanted her own family. So she explained that

"I didn't like to see a mom or a dad and children. I had so much jealousy toward them." Indeed, many of the children felt out of place when observing intact families at school events. They often suffered in solitude, and they were overwhelmed with feelings of uncontrollable yearning to have such a family.

For most of the young people, the church and school were positive environments that were filled with possibilities. These places of community support worked in concert to instill in the young people the positive principles of good behavior, spiritual values, a strong work ethic, and solid citizenship. Over time they learned to trust the nurturers and supporters. Once they realized that their teachers, pastors, and church members had their best interest at heart, the children were able to embrace fully the enrichment opportunities available in the programs of math, science, music, Bible study, and individual and team sports that helped to give them a well-rounded school and church experience. Both institutions became emotional and social lifelines for all 12 young people.

The Individual: Learning to Cope

The role of each individual in coping with the challenges resulting from parental incarceration showed that every one of them had the capacity to overcome their hardships. They had special characteristics that enabled them to develop self-confidence, positive self-images, and skills, as well as to manage their feelings and impulses as they developed and grew into adulthood. All the young people recognized the value in positive relationships. In their stories, they described the complexity and severity of home problems. In their interviews, they were able without exception to give rich descriptions of their experiences. Remarkably, every one of them stated that someone—whether it be a mother, grandmother, cousin, uncle, sibling, pastor or church member—was

instrumental in getting them through the challenging times by nurturing, encouraging, and inspiring them to be the best they could be. All 12 young people explained that they had the motivation, but they recognized that they couldn't make it on their own and welcomed all those who invested in them on their pathways to overcoming the odds. In most cases, mothers, grandmothers, and the church were their strongest and best encouragers. The young people's own will to succeed cemented their resolve to make it. They used the hardships as catalysts to venture forward and leave their despair behind.

Today, David is a confident young man who said, "I love me." He remembered turning 13 and deciding to take control of part of his life. He traveled to a prison and saw the man who had rejected him as his son. That day, when he left his father, he didn't have to wonder anymore about his heritage. David had taken a courageous step toward his healing. He became stronger in his self-identity.

David went forward with renewed strength because he had his grandmother's love and her faith in him to do whatever he set his mind to do. He is highly intelligent. He is impatient because he wants to do so much with his life. He believes that "once effort is put forth, one can always be successful in anything." David insists that "the effort is so important behind the works." He learned to appreciate his own abilities. He used the rich environment of high school to give him meaningful support. He was active physically, through his engagement in sports, and this gave him relief from his worries. He is a future doctor.

Today, Joyce is happy with herself. She is a self-evaluator who easily described herself as ambitious, confident, pretty, and unique. She is anxiously pursuing her dreams so that the world can see what a child of a prisoner can achieve. She has set her sights on

becoming an attorney. Joyce reflected that what got her through the difficult times was a strong desire to not disappoint her mother as well as her great fear of being stigmatized because her brother and sister followed her father to prison. She was well aware of the stigma attached to incarceration and used her private circumstances as her motivation to survive the hardships and challenges. She used poetry writing to express her feelings. She felt that she truly bounced back from paternal incarceration's effects because she put forth great effort to not be anything like her father.

The human condition in her neighborhood was her other strong motivator to avoid the traps of failed lives and be different. She was surrounded by drugs and violence. She stayed far from those risks. Joyce had so many negative influences to contend with, but she was stubborn in her resolve to be nothing like those in her world. She considers herself "strong-minded." She explained: "Drugs, I see people around and how they act. They want for it and now they need something and I would never want to need something that bad."

April got through her hardships with her signature smile. She had a violent father. April stated that it was her grandmother first who came to her rescue and then her mother, who encouraged her to strive for a better, safer life. She remembered that at the darkest times, she was admonished by her mother "to have a smiling face, no matter what you're going through; it doesn't matter; you keep a smile on your face."

April said that she used this strategy, along with writing her feelings down in poetry form, to cope during childhood so that she could avoid despair. She was strong enough to adapt and figure out how to manage her life without becoming bitter. She had a

harsh life, and she faced it honestly as she grew and developed, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Today, April has a quiet strength that has helped her to endure. She has a "can-do spirit." She relied on that spirit to get her through life's difficulties. April is an achiever and accepts her gift of leadership ability and has used it to become involved in organizations that will help her grow. She has been inspired by two aunts who suffered worse during childhood than she did.

April now pushes forward with much anticipation to reach her goals and fulfill her dreams. Her past struggles just made her more determined to be different. As she put it, she can "stand alone" if she has to do so. She has traveled over multiple difficult pathways and is proud to say that she persevered, got through all of it, and "still has a smile on her face." She dreams of being a child psychologist. She knows that she has the intelligence to make it a reality. She overcame and sees her survival as the gateway to a promising future.

When Leon was asked what got him through the hardships and challenges, particularly in dealing with having an incarcerated father, he stated that it was his grandmother, his uncle (who took on the role of surrogate father), mother, friends, and a teacher who steadied his course. They were the motivators who pushed him forward to survive. He never wanted to be like his father. He felt strongly about avoiding the vices in his neighborhood. He reflected on his simple sentiment: "I need to be somebody to people outside. There's something bigger than just what is on the street."

Leon had a burning desire to be somebody. He remembered working hard at becoming strong by holding on to his musical talent and using it to bring him joy and

diminish his despair. He has evolved into an independent young man who is very determined to "make it" in the world beyond his community. He sees accountant work in his future and advises everyone, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

As seen here, all of the young adults as cited in Table 2 are successfully following their aspirations and are productive, whether excelling in college or employed. Each admitted to finally accepting the reality of an abnormal life and learning to deal honestly with the bad moments. These young people weren't left alone to find coping mechanisms. They were meaningfully supported by at least one other person so that they could handle the extreme hardships that they had to face daily. They were willing to accept the help and the push themselves in a positive direction. During the process of becoming stronger, they used their own attributes to assist themselves in choosing positive outlets. Every person whom they cited as having been involved with their "making it" had an impact on every aspect of their lives.

Summary

It was the family and the community of the young people who embraced them, giving them the meaningful support that they sought and needed. These supporters gave them respite from their private worries and hope and reason to keep their dreams alive. Family and community members came to their rescue, giving them academic, social, spiritual, and emotional support that became so invaluable to them. Because of the help from these three corners of the community—family, school, and church—the African-American young people thrived, and by time they graduated from high school, all of them knew that they were resilient.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research addressed a social problem within our society that involves many African-American children who daily experience the effects of one or both parents being incarcerated in a local jail or a federal prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Incarceration causes disruptive emotional influences, situational difficulties, and environmental hardships. The threat to those children's well-being is enormous, crippling them emotionally and socially. There is a strong consensus that children of both genders are at risk for antisocial and delinquent behavior that leads them to engage in a cycle of intergenerational criminality and arrest similar to that of their parents (Eddy & Reid, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to describe the impact of parental incarceration on the lives of African-American young adults who overcame their difficult situations and went on to graduate from high school. Their stories provided evidence of how they survived. Through rich descriptive details, the stories revealed that the young people used healthy coping strategies to handle the extreme difficulties and challenges that they had to face. Their reflections covered their entire childhoods.

Research Design

The research design was a qualitative multiple-case study with an emphasis on narrative inquiry (Creswell, 1994, 2003). This approach was appropriate because I sought answers coming from the "how" questions that would be connected to the relevant contextual conditions of the social problem under study (Yin, 2003). Purposeful sampling produced 12 cases to represent the phenomenon as it impacted each case. The criteria were that each participant had to be a high-school graduate, avoided criminal behavior that would lead to prison, and had to be considered resilient. The study contained more than one case, so it was determined that a multiple-case study was required. Once the cases had been determined and the boundaries established, this type of study enabled focusing on individual cases for exploration purposes, looking within and between cases for the differences and similarities (Yin, 2003). Twelve African-American high-school graduates, who had a parent in prison when they were growing up, were interviewed. The research design construct allowed for each individual story to unfold naturally. The findings came from their perceptions about this traumatic period in their lives.

Conceptual Framework

The research was organized and carried out within a conceptual framework applying the Attachment Theory and the Risk and Resilience Theory. Both theories are tied to problems in children due to negative and positive developmental experiences.

The Attachment Theory

The Attachment Theory purports that children need emotional attachments to humans, especially mothers, to develop normally and feel secure. Without receiving

maternal affection, children tend to be affected negatively by the deprivation and they're usually considered maladjusted and having abnormal social skills (Holmes, 1993). Therefore, the theory looks at both positive and negative ramifications for children as they contend with the changes in their lives that can also affect their physical development (Bretherton, 1992).

The Risk and Resilience Theory

The "construct of resilience" enables children to reach adulthood mentally and emotionally healthy and "well functioning" and thus be characterized as having "resilience" (Ungar, 2008, p. 218). The social bonding that results in relationship-building offers children alternatives to a life marked by "criminality of parents, socio-economic disadvantages, family conflict, and chronic exposure to violence" (Braverman, 2001, pp. 1, 2; see also Garmezy & Masten, 1986; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001). Today, resilient children are recognized as moving beyond recovery to actually thriving (Bonanno, 2005).

Findings

The stories of each young person were rich with details of their experiences when one or more parents were incarcerated. In answer to the research questions "How do African-American young adults (18 years and older) describe the impact of parental incarceration on their lives, and how were they able to overcome the difficult situation and graduate from high school?" There were many findings. In the search for themes across all 12 cases, it became clear that there were three primary ways the young people were eventually able to graduate from high school. They experienced the incarceration

and were partially resilient, because of the support of their (a) family system, (b) local community, and (c) own personal strengths.

What follows is an overview of the results and several specific findings related to the overall finding.

The Family

Mothers and/or grandmothers were the caregivers for each of the 12 individuals. Despite the added hardships that were disruptive influences within their homes, the children had no fear of being turned over to foster care. The mothers and grandmothers fought despair, and they were resourceful enough to improve their lot. Emotional and financial support came from the extended family. Several mothers were not available all the time, but the children found themselves in the care of nurturing maternal grandmothers who had been asked to step in and help their floundering daughters. Grandmothers became surrogate caregivers at crucial times, and they played an important role in saving both mothers and children. These grandmothers brought a steadiness and a safe haven for the families. In a few cases, the grandmothers became permanent custodial parents and never showed distain for the new life-change. They simply found ways to cope as they brought their grandchildren up properly.

The following examples of findings of this study regarding the issue of family are the common experiences faced by these young people during prolonged periods with parental incarceration.

1. The African-American young people dealt not only with the secrecy issue concerning the incarceration, which was placed upon them as children, but also with the ensuing problems due to that mandatory silence. They faced internal conflicts because of

the diverse circumstances that arose to challenge this secrecy, and eventually they learned to handle even this burden with help.

2. The African-American young people relied on strong family bonds and relished the love and support from the few who counseled, gave of their time, and eased the social stigma by just being available to them as they dealt with paternal incarceration.

3. Although depression and withdrawal were found to be internalized problems, they were not major problems for the majority of young people during their childhoods. The children were able, with help and support, to find strategies for resilience (e.g., poetry writing). But, anxiety was found to be a part of all their lives for various reasons due to the problems brought about by the long-term and repeated imprisonments of their fathers. To relieve the pressure of their lives, they danced, played drums, sang, practically lived in church, isolated themselves, wrote thoughts down, and/or participated in school activities. They just kept busy.

4. Some felt a disconnection from their fathers, while others visited them or accepted calls and counsel from them. The children never spoke about whether or not the prisons were maximum security ones or not. What they remembered were the long drives, the unfriendly places, the policies that excluded them yet made them feel like criminals, the glass partitions, the shoe removals, the frisks, the standing alone to be scanned and stamped, and the total embarrassment and discomfort when they had to visit their fathers in large rooms with other inmates who were doing things with their adult visitors that no child should have been privy to at any time.

5. It was made clear that when the parent-child bond is broken, the trauma affects the child's ordinary experiences, and the absence of the paternal relationship produces

instability and constant longing within the child. The boys seemed to have been affected most by not having their fathers to teach them how to be a man.

The Community

Church Support

The church provided a broad level of community support for each of the 12 individuals. It brought stability and safety and gave them a sense of purpose for their lives. The majority of the young people felt that during their childhood years the church was the place where they felt normal and found acceptance without judgment. It was in the church that they found listeners, counselors, and father figures. They weren't afraid to expose their weaknesses. Their strong connection to religious life centered them and gave them opportunities to learn about spiritual connection through religious teachings. They were nurtured and uplifted by the pastors and members, and they thrived as they learned new strategies (e.g., studying the Bible, playing instruments, singing, etc.) to help them to cope. They cherished the help and support. The young people accepted the lifeline of church involvement as they faced challenges. The church took on great importance in their lives as they shared their talents and learned how to be strong and unafraid.

The following are examples of findings of this study regarding church support for the young people who had to face parental incarceration.

1. The African-American young people considered the church as a source of learning, teaching, help, support, nurturing, surrogate fathers, and, most importantly, Christians willing to listen. Pastors, uncles, familiar church members, and strangers invested in them and made them feel safe and secure. The result was that the young people developed a strong connection to religious life.

2. Grandmothers were great influencers in these fractured families. Many of them brought religion into their grandchildren's lives during paternal incarceration. The young people without hesitation credited those women for their regular attendance and involvement in the church. Grandmothers played a significant role in convincing their own daughters that church life would give them and their children relief from their troubled lives.

3. Three in five boys had significant externalizing problems at the high schools they attended. Teachers tried very hard to have them placed in special education. The boys were targeted as having attention problems. Each boy fought successfully not to become labeled and went on to complete high school because he had church support. In two cases, other caring teachers stepped in, and in another, removal to a new high school was the best solution. Mothers also played important roles in helping their children overcome barriers through their religious affiliations.

School Support

The school gave meaningful support. It was an important institution in the community for the young people because it became a refuge, a place where they felt safe and free of their home worries. It was at school where the young people found administrators and teachers who inspired them and pushed them to take advantage of their potential and academically soar. The teachers encouraged a well-rounded education, and they invested their time and energy in the young people to make sure that they had the opportunity to have positive school experiences. Teachers rescued them from negative places by listening to them and guiding them. Those relationships helped the young people to become stronger, develop competence, and find the confidence to fight

to achieve their dreams as they recognized that their way out of their hardships was through a solid education. The teachers exposed the young people to a wider world through extracurricular activities. They, in turn, accepted peer support, as well as the advocacy by their mothers on their behalf. The school was the place where the children found success. The young people allowed such caring to catapult them to new heights in their pursuit of productive futures.

The following are examples of findings of this study regarding school support for the young people who faced parental incarceration during their childhoods.

1. School was an intellectual and social outlet for the young people and a place where they found safety and academic success.

2. The young people were able to own their academic lives through their teachers' guidance, thereby realizing personal growth during the high-school years.

3. School nurtured their personal motivations. A variety of extracurricular sports activities and academic enrichment programs prepared the young people for leadership through responsibility, respect for others, sportsmanship, and teamwork.

Individual Strengths

The 12 young people possessed an array of hidden personal strengths that were assets to them as they faced the effects of paternal incarceration. Each person was unique and handled the crisis in his or her own way with meaningful supportive help. Each individual made sure to connect with a grandmother, mother, sister, uncle, brothers, aunts, and their own spirituality. In striving to survive both the extreme anxiety and stress caused by the difficult challenges, all 12 adopted effective coping strategies that brought them relief and healthy ways to manage their feelings. Each young person's temperament

dictated the course of action taken to make things more tolerable. The kinds of coping outlets came in two stages. First, there were the private, internal struggles of pretending life was different, keeping silent and resorting to secrecy, praying, experiencing a vision, finding an alone space to think, dancing, and capturing pain in poetry or letter writing. Then, as the young people accepted their own personal growth and recognized that help was needed beyond them, each individual turned to external or public outlets that nurtured and eventually helped immensely in their survival. Each individual had sufficient faith, belief in self, belief in one's talent and ability, courage to seek help, and ability to recover and self-right. Each one survived with a sense of humor.

The following are examples of findings of this study regarding individual strengths of the young people who faced parental incarceration during their childhoods.

1. Each found meaning in the suffering. In all cases, the participants acknowledged that they found their purpose and their strength due to the complex and difficult issues that they had to face during the years of parental incarceration.

2. No one succumbed to their negative internal or external environments. Those who experienced violence and/or verbal abuse from drug-addicted or alcoholic fathers didn't allow such severe misfortune to become generational. Each of the 12 cases showed fortitude in facing adversity. There were no outward signs of being programmed to exhibit antisocial acts as an adult. Instead, a social consciousness was exhibited that revealed emerging leadership ability. Each individual is committed to service for the underprivileged and children like themselves. All 12 participants are volunteers in soup kitchens, youth centers/camps, child-care establishments, etc. Everyone joined a service organization and champion the downtrodden.

3. Some individuals suffered through the repeated release from prison and return of their fathers to their homes, but never gave in to pity. Experiencing anxiety was an individual condition faced in varying degrees. Each used survival strategies such as prayer and/or writing to cope. Individuals wondered and experienced a feeling of uncertainty about whether or not their fathers would change in order to be home permanently.

4. Inspite of the difficult situation, each person remained in a family unit. Not one was removed from mothers' or grandmothers' care and placed in foster care. The Federal Adoption & Safe Families Act of 1997 didn't seep into their homes because, traditionally, African-American families do not give their children up to strangers as cited in chapter 2.

Discussion

Family, community, and individuals came together in partnership to assure the satisfactory passage of children of prisoners to adulthood. The family did provide a place of positive attachments. None of them suffered from a disconnection to everyone else after the trauma. The most important aspect of the Attachment Theory is that children need to be socially and emotionally attached to a primary caretaker (Bretherton, 1992). The rich descriptions of human relationships and the positive development of the 12 African-American young people are rooted in this intergenerational connection, thus aiding their development and normalcy. In each of the cases, it is clear that the 12 individuals interacted with a custodial mother or grandmother who was sensitive to their needs and responsive in positive ways. A very strong illustration of the Attachment Theory was at work.

The 12 young people spoke about their mothers and grandmothers being able to care for them under harsh conditions. In their households, they observed their mothers going without food so that they themselves could eat, absent because they were holding down two or three jobs, crying constantly because they were overwhelmed, becoming wedded to the church for emotional support, and showing gratitude to extended family members who gave financial support. They witnessed their grandmothers taking over the role of some of their parents and never hearing them complain about the new hardships. Their grandmothers simply loved and encouraged them as they figured out how to stretch their own meager funds. In each case, the young person learned lessons of resiliency. The traditional inherent characteristics of Black women were found in their mothers and grandmothers. The women were self-reliant, assertive, and independent thinkers. Their innate strengths were passed on to the young people, who considered them their heroes.

The Risk and Resilience Theory's premise involves children having the capacity not only to overcome adversities but to function normally, using the protective processes available to them as their lifelines (Masten, 2001). The stories recounted by the 12 young people showed that they had both the capacity to navigate uncharted pathways and the good sense to negotiate for the support they needed from nurturing relationships to sustain their normal development. Their chosen pathways were directly related to the tenet of the Risk and Resilience theory.

Throughout each case, the young person's social skills were seen to improve because the family attended church regularly. Through either their mothers or grandmothers, all the young people reported that they were introduced to the religious life. They learned to play musical instruments, committed to Bible study, joined choirs,

and accepted members as their surrogate fathers. They made friends with peers and enjoyed intimate conversations. It was in the church where they honed their personal identity. Their self-esteem soared under the church's tutelage. In the stories across the 12 cases, the young people openly discussed their religion as a stabilizing, sustaining, and motivating force in their development.

Historically, African Americans value religion in their culture (Davis, 1997). Grandmothers tend to be members of churches that nurture this culture. This social link to the church most likely fosters "stability and connectedness" within families (Hanlon et al., 2007, p. 359; see also Chatters & Taylor, 1988). So grandmothers encourage their grandchildren to partake of spiritual things. These 12 individuals followed cultural patterns (e.g., spirituality) that have always been the strength of the race and leaned on religious relatives and the church for survival (Sudarkasa, 1997). They saw the church as their anchor. They accepted its practices as it adhered to the cultural tradition of being an integral part of community life. Many researchers have argued that in the Black culture, the strong cultural identity is important when discussing resiliency because "resilient children need resilient families and communities" (Ungar, 2008, p. 221).

The public environment of the school also was a positive experience for the African-American young people. The school was a safe zone for support and nurturance. The young people were impacted significantly by their interaction with principals, teachers, and peers. The efforts of some adult individuals strengthened the resolve of the young people to take advantage of skill-focused experiences and become achievers. The young people allowed themselves to be rescued by caring individuals.

They also survived cultural biases in some cases. Some of the young people had teachers from a different culture. Multicultural competence was necessary in classrooms in order to advance the teachers' personal skills for working with African-American students. It would have been helpful in the few cases if the teachers had acknowledged their own biases (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 2002). According to Dallaire (2007), counselors in schools should be made aware that children of prisoners most likely are living in poverty, as were the 12 in this study. Therefore, having this knowledge could help teachers recognize the children's needs. This awareness validates the children's experiences and helps to find positive strategies for them in classrooms.

To cope with the stressors during the time of paternal incarceration, these African-American young people made an effort to not exhibit negative behaviors. As a result of their personal decisions to take advantage of school life, they had advocates working on their behalf. In most cases, they were spared the indifference of teachers and peers. According to Travis and Waul (2003), children of prisoners experience feeling the sting of stigma from teachers and peers in schools. Being stigmatized within the school setting adds to their struggle and helps to cause low self-esteem. But these 12 individuals weren't derailed by self-esteem issues. They were confident young people who saw their present circumstances as opportunities and their futures as promising.

Each African-American young person believed that he or she turned out fine. Their individual strengths were seen in their determination to overcome the hardships due in part to parental incarceration. Each individual was proud of surviving the struggle, learning strategies to cope, and making a difference in their world. Self-esteem was high in all of them. Each learned lasting lessons from their experiences, and although each

refuses to forget, they will not allow those psychosocial difficulties to direct their future paths. The resilience that has surfaced over the years has made them accept the part that they played in adapting differently when they were under high risks and adversity. According to Masten (2009), the Risk and Resilience Theory is applicable in describing the pathways the children took to overcome risks successfully. Each story described vividly the support systems that were there for them.

The 12 young people's experiences can help research scholars see that, with the right kind of support, children and families not only can survive adversity and risks but can meet their own needs (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002b). It is important to note that this population of children is in a unique position to assist schools in locating others like themselves. The 12 in this study could have identified other children of prisoners for school officials. In most cases, the participants interacted with other children who were experiencing parental incarceration too. Based on the findings, here are some recommendations.

Recommendations

My recommendations are organized by major themes. Each speaks to the concerns of the participants and the shared strengths demonstrated in this study. The most viable recommendations were selected based upon consideration of the young people's stories in the light of their diverse experiences, and the existing documented research literature that indicates that researchers have a vested interest in knowing and doing more for this segment of a population that has gone unnoticed for so long. The African-American children's experiences presented here come from voices seldom heard. Action

is the key to change, and the following are recommended steps that can solve the problem of struggling to overcome the experience of parental incarceration.

1. Create a program that targets this population without cultural or program bias. This can be an asset in building trust within communities of color. Applying sensitivity when helping to develop cultural identity will help to promote goodwill. The program can be structured to save parents first by providing a net for them. The targeted parents can either be individuals drawn to considering committing petty crimes or are so overwhelmed by the downward spiral in their lives that they are unable to function normally. Nonprofit child-care practitioners, local public service providers, and community organizations can collaborate; they can use their resources for creating skill-building training programs such as computer tutoring and academic tutoring, and for improving job opportunities in order to decrease the desperation. The program can help the children by hiring professionals who can help them rethink what is best for them and who can know their needs by listening to them in the friendly environment this program can create.

2. Establish door-to-door approaches by local family service representatives, which can expose them to real problems in the lives of custodial mothers. The aim is to build relationships with the mothers to ease their burdens in small ways. The objective is to slow the process of downward spiraling due to meager funds and few resources. Public agencies can produce a booklet and a companion DVD of short-term and long-term services that have numerous local resources that can provide a lifeline to struggling families.

3. All parties interested in strengthening African-American families should know where such families are living through the establishment of a national database to house information regarding inmates' children. This database can allow families on the outside to give anonymous, truthful information without fear of public ridicule.

4. Honor family ties by incarcerating parents in the jails or prisons nearest to their homes so that families can visit them without being overburdened. If the children are minors, provide appropriate programs when they visit, and make the prisons child-friendly, keeping all inappropriate adult behavior out of their view.

5. It should be mandated that state or federal legislation focuses on this unique social problem with African-American mothers in mind who care for the children after a parent is arrested and incarcerated. Public figures must get involved through the courts on the local state level. Hold open forums that gather feedback from the community to learn as much as possible about how the families are really faring, and then elicit volunteers to work with families and to report their findings monthly so that significant help can be rendered.

6. Establish neighborhood watches for parents who commit petty crimes. Steer them toward help so that their criminal acts do not escalate further. Have police departments, medical doctors, social workers, and other local professionals form a counseling service to save parents who commit only petty crimes. Set up volunteer centers in poor neighborhoods to help parents who are desperate and susceptible to committing these acts because they feel that they have nowhere to turn for help. Enlist professional care by providing tools (e.g., computer tutoring, mentors, etc.) to help good parents before they are removed from families by the law. Prevent these parents from

going to local jails by painting clear pictures of what will happen to their children if they are not there. Give them what they need and their families a fighting chance to not become fractured.

7. Establish a place of hope for children of prisoners where they can assemble and exchange detailed information that is distributed to a national database once a month from telephone hotline calls. Use resilient children of prisoners over the age of 18 to be the hotline's human connection. They must be listeners and give meaningful support when needed.

8. Address, through volunteer services, the stigma felt by children in their neighborhoods. Reduction of ignorance may come through building relationships between children and neighbors. Establish a partner program to improve relationships and help children avoid antisocial behavior.

9. Address law-enforcement procedures as they relate to children who witness the arrests of parents. Nationwide, establish mandatory laws that will force police officers to properly assist the children by decreasing their fears through new child-friendly procedures. All personnel who might come in contact with the children must receive sensitivity training. Establish a program that partners with the local police departments to make sure that an officer is immediately assigned to a child to assess safety issues after a parent has been incarcerated.

10. In African-American communities, generally, people have strong religious beliefs. Therefore, have the church play a larger role in helping hurting families struggling with parental incarceration by establishing partnerships with other more affluent churches outside of disadvantaged communities. Together, recruit members to

get involved by helping to improve the lives of mothers by becoming prayer partners, teachers of parenting classes, mentors, financial guides, counselors, and meal planners. In addition, recruit members to inspire the children by listening to them, teaching them, making them feel safe and secure without judgment, and allowing them to speak. The goal is to build trusting relationships with supportive faith-based adults.

11. Conduct sensitivity workshops for school administrators and teachers which include role-playing so that they can walk in the shoes of the children and be willing to listen and not judge them. Follow up the workshops with strong programs to continue building trust. Address administrators' and teachers' dilemma in not knowing what to ask children of prisoners. The positive actions taken may help improve academic performance and curtail anti-social behaviors.

Recommendations for Additional Research

For several decades, children of prisoners have received limited attention by researchers, despite the enormous amount of documented literature about parental incarceration. Past and even current scholarly practices have made it almost impossible to obtain accurate and abundant official information on children such as 12 in this study (LaVigne et al., 2008; Simmons, 2000). Therefore, a change of attitude and behavior is needed regarding this social problem. This study supports a change in the direction of research on children of incarcerated parents to concentrate on the realities of where and how they live. The research efforts must address the stigma that is so prevalent and dominant. Such stigma prevents real progress in intervention and knowledge about their actual needs.

The silence causes great mental anxiety. This study supports research conducted specifically to break down barriers through finding alternative approaches that understand culture nuances. In the African-American community, the culture of keeping family matters private must be considered as researchers look to find ways to help children feel free to talk about the impact of parental incarceration. By understanding this cultural paradigm, researchers' perspectives may lead to a more balanced assessment in the reporting of this issue. Sensitivity is needed, along with open minds to differences.

In most cases, African Americans are not visible in research (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). This study also supports conducting research to describe their lives from their perspectives. The children are the ones left behind; they are the survivors, whether they succumb to their adversities or adapt and overcome the negative impacts. The sociological trend is to overlook these children and their families, but there is so much everyone can lose if the trend continues. The children need safe, secure homes with a parent who can manage the acute changes in their lives. Just as there are coaches for sports teams whose sole job is to manage and develop talent, this study recommends developing coaches for the left-behind custodial parents. Providing an overwhelmed mother with a person who knows when to listen and when to guide, could stave off poor decisions she might make that can lead to heightened anxiety in her children.

Furthermore, public conversations need to take place that focus on creating direct involvement with the children who can recount specifics about their experiences with parental incarceration. Professionals need to ask the children. The children can become assets as they lead researchers to the target geographical locations of where they live and

they articulate exactly what their physical and social needs are when one or both parents are locked up.

This study supports research being the catalyst for change. Articles sent to the homes of prisoners, and workshops on the protection of children from violent criminal parents could both strengthen and teach the custodial parents how to better protect their children. Such workshops for custodial parents will give them options for managing their situations. This study also supports the involvement of community institutions such as churches and schools and local frontline service providers collaborating to inform researchers about positive changes that can be beneficial to the children of incarcerated parents.

Conclusion

Upon review of this study, it is apparent that the 12 African-American offspring are its heroes. At the end of all the interviews, the stories captured the aspects of their lives and had illuminated details that only they could give. They had the courage to put a human face on this social problem and create conversation about this population.

This study has followed the pathways of 12 African-American young people who described their bumpy roads of self-discovery. They didn't linger over the obstacles they fought because they were children of prisoners but rather expressed their joy of being known as survivors and overcomers. This is their resiliency story; they are dream chasers!

The 12 young offspring seized this opportunity; they felt honored to have been chosen for this project. The very first interviewee showed no sign of anxiety. Rachel kept repeating how grateful she was to be given this opportunity. She exclaimed that no one

had ever asked her how she felt about having a father in prison and, most of all, how it impacted her life. These words were repeated over and over by the others in their interviews. The 12 are not only realistic about their lives; they are practical. From their perspective, parental incarceration has an upside. It can be the best motivator for achieving and rising above daunting circumstances.

Their minds seemed never to be at rest because they are so enthralled with life's blessings. They are grateful young people because they received emotional support from such extended family members as grandmothers, uncles, brothers, sisters, and aunts. Their mothers encouraged, pushed, prodded them, and reinvented themselves so that they could have reasons to see possibilities beyond their neighborhoods. They are humbled by their mothers' love. They accepted this love willingly and forged ahead stubbornly with a healthy degree of independence and optimism. They are capable and unafraid of life.

All of them determined early not to be like their fathers, and they had the good sense to accept support and nurturing from the religious community. Those wonderful Christians who became their surrogate fathers and those pastors who listened and guided the children can never be replaced in their hearts. They, too, are true heroes. Over the years, the young people have grown in faith and they attribute their love for spiritual things as having come from their experiences with the church families and their grandmothers and mothers who valued the religious life. They are centered by their faith.

They also have an eternal gratitude to the teachers and administrators who never gave up on them. They see some school friends as angels who picked them up when they were down and discouraged. The schools became their safe places where they found caring individuals who many times went beyond their responsibilities to save them. With

family pushing them and with the teachers teaching them how to take advantage of every opportunity that the school offered, the young people found not only academic successes but excelled beyond anyone's expectations.

The young people are ambitious! They are creative and resourceful, and they want to control their own destiny. Ten of them are in colleges, doing well. Their futures look bright. They are on track to become teachers, doctors (e.g., neurosurgeon, pediatrician), a laboratory technician, a child psychologist, an FBI agent, counselors, day-care providers, and lawyers advocating for at-risk children. They can't wait to show the world what a child of a prisoner can achieve. Through their own microscopic lens, they consider themselves unique.

The young people are emerging leaders. All 12 are engaged in some sort of community service. They care about others' well-being. For example, Daniel temporarily dropped out of college to actually become the caregiver of an elderly, sick minister. The minister needed kindness and someone to care. Daniel feels that this is no sacrifice because of the support he received when he so desperately needed it from his church family. The young people worry about other children's safety. Rachel is a good example; she has a burning desire to become a public servant to assist poor families who are at the bottom of society and need help desperately. Her mission is to keep them out of shelters, or at least help them to understand that there is a way up. She wants to give them the means, the tools, and the support to do better. She wants to make this a part of her life's work by changing laws and giving voice to the voiceless. All 12 young people watch over family; they draw strength from them. They have become involved in organizations (e.g., Girl Scouts, NAACP) that develop leaders.

Their can-do spirits continue to propel them to new heights in the fulfillment of their dreams. They chase those dreams with vigor and remain steadfast to their set goals. They are living now by their own instincts and good decisions. They are society's natural resource and society's future. These 12 young people make the future look inviting. They germinate hope through their amazing lives.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO CONTACTS DETAILING THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY AND REQUESTING REFERRALS OF POTENIAL PARTICIPANTS

Letter requesting referrals of African-American young adults whose childhood experiences were impacted by parental incarceration.

November 16th, 2009

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

My name is Diana Ming and I need to conduct interviews for a qualitative multiple case study for the purpose of completing my doctoral degree in Leadership from the School of Education at Andrews University.

I am requesting help in identifying African-American young adults whose childhood experiences were impacted enormously by parental incarceration. They had strong at-risk factors against them at every turn but in-spite of the harmful physical, psychological and social traumatization, they had protective influences that buffered them throughout and contributed to their will to succeed, graduate from high school and never, ever have committed a criminal act.

I am looking for resilient young people who have a story to share and the courage to give candid interviews, face to face. I want to record their perceptions and feelings so that the study can benefit those who are exposed to similar life experiences. Moreover, impact social science research and educational practice by introducing a fuller understanding about this complex problem. Please complete and return the attach information form about the potential participants in the enclosed self addressed envelope.

If you have any questions about the study, I encourage you to contact my advisor, Dr. Sylvia Gonzalez, Leadership & Administration program at Andrews University (269-471-6702.

Cordially,
M. Diana Ming
Doctoral Student
Andrews University

Email: diming47@hotmail.com
Mobile: 917-837-9904

Letters to be sent to Church leaders

November 16th, 2009

Diana Ming
260 W. 52nd Street, Apt. 28C
New York, N.Y. 10019
Email: diming47@hotmail.com
Cell: 917-837-9904

Dear Church leader:

Greetings in the name of Jesus! Trusting that your ministry is flourishing and you are reaping fruits from your labor. We are living in exciting times but, unfortunately so many are not feeling the goodness of God, especially those innocent ones who have parents imprisoned.

I am completing my doctoral degree in Leadership and Administration from the School of Education at Andrews University and I need to conduct interviews for a qualitative multiple case study.

I am requesting help in identifying African-American young adults whose childhood experiences were impacted enormously by parental incarceration. They had strong at-risk factors against them at every turn but in-spite of the harmful physical, psychological and social traumatization, they had protective influences that buffered them throughout and contributed to their will to succeed, graduate from high school and never, ever have committed a criminal act.

I am looking for resilient young people who have a story to share and the courage to give candid interviews, face to face. I want to record their perceptions and feelings so that the study can benefit those who are exposed to similar life experiences. Moreover, impact social science research and educational practice by introducing a fuller understanding about this complex problem. Please complete and return the attach information form about the potential participants in the enclosed self addressed envelope.

Cordially,
M. Diana Ming
M. Diana Ming
Doctoral Student
Andrews University

Letters to be sent to Professional Colleagues

November 16th, 2009

260 W. 52nd Street, Apt. 28C
New York, N. Y. 10019
Email: diming47@hotmail.com
Cell: 917-837-9904

Dear Colleague:

I am completing my doctoral program at Andrews University and my proposed study is on the Impact of Parental Incarceration on Resilient African-American Young Adults. I am requesting help in identifying the individuals who fit the criteria for my study. The central question of my study is "How do resilient African-American young adults affected by parental incarceration during childhood describe their experiences?" The criteria that I will use to identify them are:

- They experienced in their childhood levels of complex problems and possibly new risks during parental incarceration.
- They avoided criminal patterns and antisocial tendencies.
- They are considered resilient.
- They graduated from high school and could attend college or trade school.

Your cooperation and involvement in such a serious undertaking as this study indicates your desire to help dispel myths. Your willingness to help enables me to share information of perceptions and feelings of the young people who have gone through the trauma successfully and wish to inspire and strengthen those who are presently exposed to similar life experiences. Please complete and return the attach information form about the potential participants in the enclosed self addressed envelope.

Cordially,
M. Diana Ming
M. Diana Ming
Education Consultant

APPENDIX B

REQUEST FORM TO BE COMPLETED OF POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

List of Potential Participants, 18 Years and Older. Print the following information on this form:

Name: _____ Age ____ Name: _____ Age ____

Address:_____ Address:_____

_____ _____

(Home Telephone Number) _____ (Home Telephone Number) _____

(Cell Telephone Number) _____ (Cell Telephone Number) _____

E-mail Address (Optional) _____ E-mail Address (Optional) _____

Name: _____ Age ____ Name: _____ Age ____

Address:_____ Address:_____

_____ _____

(Home Telephone Number) _____ (Home Telephone Number) _____

(Cell Telephone Number) _____ (Cell Telephone Number) _____

E-mail Address (Optional) _____ E-mail Address (Optional) _____

Name: _____ Age ____ Name: _____ Age ____

Address:_____ Address:_____

_____ _____

(Home Telephone Number) _____ (Home Telephone Number) _____

(Cell Telephone Number) _____ (Cell Telephone Number) _____

E-mail Address (Optional) _____ E-mail Address (Optional) _____

Name: _____ Age ____ Name: _____ Age ____

Address:_____ Address:_____

_____ _____

(Home Telephone Number) _____ (Home Telephone Number) _____

(Cell Telephone Number) _____ (Cell Telephone Number) _____

E-mail Address (Optional) _____ E-mail Address (Optional) _____

APPENDIX C

MASTER LIST OF CONTACTS SUGGESTIONS OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS

Resilient African-American Young Adults Eligible to Participate in Study

Name	Geographical Location of Residence	School or Work Status	Years Impacted by Parental Incarceration	Protective Buffers	Participant's Contact Information

APPENDIX D

LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Copy of letters to be sent to Potential Participants:

January 08, 2009

260 W. 52nd Street, Apt. 28C
New York, N. Y. 10019
Email: diming47@hotmail.com
Cell: 917-837-9904

Dear Participant:
My name is Diana Ming and I am an educational consultant, working on behalf of at-risk children. Presently, I am completing my doctoral program at Andrews University, in Michigan, and my proposed study is on the Impact of Parental Incarceration on Resilient African-American Young Adults. I am requesting your help in this endeavor. The central question of my study is "How do Resilient African-American young adults affected by parental incarceration during childhood describe their experience?" My criteria in selecting subjects include the following:

- You experienced in your childhood levels of complex problems and possibly new risks during parental incarceration
- You avoided criminal patterns and antisocial tendencies
- You have been adaptable and resilient as you experienced parents incarceration during childhood, graduated from high school and could attend college or trade school

Your cooperation and involvement in such a serious study assures me that you want to inspire and strengthen those who are exposed to similar life experiences. You want education practitioners and social science scholars to be better inform through your personal stories, perceptions and feelings. Attached are a commitment form and a pre-interview survey for you to sign.

Cordially,
M. Diana Ming
M. Diana Ming
Doctoral Student
Andrews University

Study: Impact of Parental Incarceration on Resilient African-American Young Adults: The Psychological, Social and Academic Consequences

April 1, 2009
Dear African-American Young Adult:

I am a doctoral student in Leadership from the School of Education at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan and I am conducting a short survey about your childhood experience with parental incarceration for my dissertation study. Current research studies have indicated that you are the largest group left behind by one or both parents due to incarceration. The purpose of this research study survey is to begin the process of gathering information that will be helpful in obtaining a clear picture of your earlier life trauma. You have been selected by people who believe that you have an extraordinary story to share and you have the courage to give candid interviews about your perceptions and insight. Participation in this study is fully voluntary and you have the right to choose not to participate. Please do not forward this message to someone else if you choose not to participate, simply delete this consent letter.

If you agree to participate in this study, please fill out the email survey. There is no identifying information required. Your name will not be disclosed in any published documents written about this study. All information collected will be documented in writing and will be analyzed as part of my doctoral dissertation. All data obtained will be shared with the primary researcher's dissertation committee. I will ask you questions about total years parent imprisoned; total number of surrogate parents during parental incarceration; total years on your own; the sharing of one story that depicts why you never exhibited criminal behavior and what you think and feel about the impact on your life as a child of a prisoner. This exercise should take 15 minutes. This is the beginning of the interview process. It is a way to find out if you are willing to commit to multiple interviews by the researcher that will take forty-five to ninety minutes. This will give you time to share the details of your childhood life experience as a resilient individual in more depth.

Your participation is anonymous. I will not collect your email address or anything that will identify you. Anything shared with me will remain confidential and will be accessed only by those who are directly involved in this study. Your time is the only cost for participation. If there is any negative reaction from recalling memories of your childhood trauma during the interview process, there will be support for you. A psychologist and a social worker will be available as needed. There will be no compensation for participating.

The results of this study may assist in aiding the knowledge base of social scientists and educational practitioners for the purpose of extending their understanding of this complex issue of children left behind due to parental incarceration.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns at (917) 837-9904 or by email: diming47@hotmail.com

You may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Sylvia Gonzalez at (269) 471-6702 or sylviag@andrews.edu

All research on human subjects is reviewed by a committee that works diligently to protect your rights and to make sure you are not harmed by your decision to participate in this study. If you have concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (269) -471-6361, Andrews University.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,
M. Diana Ming
M. Diana Ming
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX E

CONSENT LETTER FOR PRE-INTERVIEW

PARTICIPANTS PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY
BY EMAIL OR TRADITIONAL MAIL

Consent Letter for Pre-interview Survey

Study: Impact of Parental Incarceration on Resilient African-American Young Adults: The Psychological, Social and Academic Consequences

April 1, 2009
Dear African-American Young Adult:

You have agreed to participate in this study and I thank you for your willingness to help give a deeper understanding about your experiences during childhood after being left behind by your parent (s) due to incarceration. It is so important to the investigation that explanations are given by you through your lens of understanding yourself and your world.

It is time to sit with you and have conversations about your perceptions and insights on your life. But, before the follow-up interviews, I need you to answer the attached pre-interview questions. As you know by now, the characteristics of this study lead to answering questions so that I am able to gather evidence to support how you successfully came through the trauma of parental incarceration and are considered resilient. As the primary researcher, I want the process to be comfortable for you. If it is not in the future, there is additional support for you. A psychologist and a social worker are available to help you sort out feelings.

My goal is to produce the clearest picture or evidence of this human problem and it includes an understanding that is true to all the data collected. Therefore, this is another step in the flexible plan to gather information. Please feel free to answer each question because it will take us to the face-to-face interviews. By completing and returning this survey, you are also consenting to be interviewed face-to-face with the primary researcher.

There is a self-addressed envelope included for your convenience to return documents with your signature.

_____
Signature of Participant

Thank you once again for your cooperation and willingness to share
Sincerely,
M. Diana Ming
Doctoral Student

Email to Resilient African-American Young Adults who fit criterion:

January 08, 2009

Dear (Participant by name):

You have been referred to me as a resilient individual who adapted with positive results to the difficult circumstance of one or both parents incarcerated. As you know, African-American parents are the largest group in prison, thereby, making you, their children, increasingly at high risk and without them each day. Your perceptions and feelings will be of great value to this study.

Here's what I need from you: please respond to the following questions:

1. Total years parent imprisoned

2. Total number of surrogate parents during incarceration

3. Total years on your own

4. Please describe why you never exhibited criminal behavior? (Share a story)

5. What do you think would help lessen the impact of parental incarceration?

6. Would you be willing to be interviewed to share your experience as a resilient individual in more depth?

□Yes □No

7. If you wish to share a drawing, poem, or letter that captures your feelings during this period of parental incarceration that will help give a clearer picture, feel free to do so. Your personal writings or drawings will not be used in the study unless you give permission.

Participants Pre-Interview Survey

Participant Characteristics

Age_____ Racial Identity_____

Ethnicity_____

Circle or Write what is applicable

Highest level of schooling (circle one)

High School Some College Associate Degree

Occupation_____

Geographical Location_____

Family Characteristics

Number of siblings 1 2 3 4 5 6

Females_____ Males_____

Were you the eldest? Yes No

Did you live with your siblings? Yes No

Both parents incarcerated one parent incarcerated

Did your parent live with you prior to incarceration? Yes No

How old were you when parent or parents incarcerated? _____

How many times did the parent or parents go to prison? _____

Were your parents married? Yes No

How old were you when incarcerated parent was released? _____

How did you feel? _____

_____

_____

Comments:

APPENDIX F

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS MEETING CRITERIA

List of Resilient African-American Young Adults of Parental Incarceration Identified Meeting Criterion:

Participant's Name	City/State	Gender	Yrs parent(s) Unreachable	Protective Buffers/ Influences	Participant's Information	Race	Ethnicity	School Attended

APPENDIX G

PROCEDURES

Andrews University

Leadership & Educational Administration Department

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Impact of Parental Incarceration on Resilient African-American Young Adults: The Psychological, Social and Academic Consequences: a Multiple Case Study

_____I have been told that Diana Ming will be interviewing me_____ for the purpose of completing her doctoral degree in Leadership from the School of Education at Andrews University.

_____I have been told that the purpose of the study is to describe in narrative form the issues embedded in the traumatic life event of parental incarceration and its impact on childhood for obtaining a fuller understanding. I must be18 years or older to participate. I must be willing to share feelings and perceptions about my experiences and give insight on how I coped with the at-risk stressors, giving the best and clearest picture in the semi-structured interviews conducted by the primary researcher.

_____I have been told that my participation in the study will benefit social science research and educational practice as I help to identify key elements needed for understanding the lived experiences as perceived by African-American young Adults.

_____I have been told that the study will be conducted face to face or by telephone interviews. The interviews will last up to ninety minutes. Participation in this study will involve follow up interviews as necessary. Further, I understand that the study will be conducted by mutual consent in a place that absolves all whether at a public library, internet café or local church, and all locations are considered natural settings with no liability to me. None of the interview questions will involve any experiment.

_____I have been told that by me participating in the interview, that there will be no implied liability whether oral or written of my legal rights.

_____ I have been told that there is a possibility that some of the resilient African-American young adults participating in this study may have a negative reaction or experience some level of stress from recalling memories of their childhood trauma of having one or both parents incarcerated. Should there be any negative reaction to the interviews or the survey, there will be social workers/psychologists to offer their services. I have been told that this inquiry seeks to bring no harm to the participants who volunteer.

_____I acknowledge that my participation in the study is fully voluntary. I have been told that refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalties or benefits.

_____I have been told that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document.

_____I have been told that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study.

_____I have been told that I will not receive any monetary compensation or other type of inducement for participating in this study.

_____I have been told that if I wish to contact Dr. Sylvia Gonzalez, Diana's advisor or an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any complaint that I may have about the study, I may contact her at Andrews University, School of Education, Bell Hall Suite #173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104 (269) 471-6702 for information and assistance.

_____I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by M. Diana Ming. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. I am fully aware that if I have any additional questions or concerns. I may contact Marilyn Diana Ming in writing at 260 W. 52nd Street, Apt. 28C, New York, N. Y. 10019 or by email: diming47@hotmail.com or by mobile phone: (917) 837-9904.

_____I have been given a copy of this consent.

My participation in this study occurred on _____ and involved a ninety minute interview between Diana Ming and me.

_____ _____
Signature Date

_____ _____
Witness Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

_____ _____ _____
Signature of Researcher Telephone Date

Andrews University

Leadership & Educational Administration Department

Informed Consent Form: Semi- Structured Interviews: The Quality of Resilience of African-American Young Adults

Title of Study:
Impact of Parental Incarceration on Resilient African-American Young Adults: The Psychological, Social and Academic Consequences

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Purpose:
I have been told that if I choose to participate, I will be voluntarily participating in a research study. The primary purpose of this study is to invite resilient African-American young adults (ages18 and older) to describe their lived experiences and perceptions of childhood parental incarceration's impact and how those experiences may have affected them—how they were able to survive and adapt to the traumatic life event without ever exhibiting antisocial tendencies and succumbing to criminal acts. Where did they draw hope and strength from during their childhood? A fuller understanding of these young people's perspectives regarding the reality of their lives may assist in aiding the knowledge base of social scientists and educational practitioners for the purpose of extending their understanding of this complex issue.

I have been told that I will be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews. I will be asked open-ended questions by the interviewer. The interview will last 45-90 minutes and will take place in a mutually agreed location such as a public library, internet café or local church. I agree that these places constitute natural settings that absolve all with no liability to me. The semi-structured interview will be conducted by the primary researcher.

Procedures:
I have been told that I must be eighteen or older to participate in these interviews and will be required to sign an informed consent form.

I give permission for the researcher to obtain proof of my high school graduation in order to qualify for this study.

I have been told that the interviews will be recorded so that analysis can be done at a later date by the primary researcher.

The information collected by the semi-structured interviews will be documented in writing in the form of a doctoral dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Leadership from Andrews University. The dissertation will be shared with the primary researcher's dissertation committee and upon approval will be published.

Risks and Discomforts

I have been told that the risk associated with participation in this study is limited. That is, no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life, such as routine tests conducted for psychological or physical reasons. I have been told that should I experience any risk or discomfort associated with the study, that social workers and psychologists are available who will help and support me with intervention to minimize level of risk. I have been informed and I understand that this inquiry seeks to bring no harm to me.

Risks of Injury:
I have been told that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and/or Anonymity:

I have been told that my identity (name) will not be disclosed in any published documents written about this study. I further understand that if I present my high school diploma or Year Book as proof of graduation, the researcher will maintain strict confidentiality. I am assured that no personal or identifying information will be disclosed in any published documents without explicit permission to do so. Anything shared with the primary researcher will remain confidential and will be accessed only by those who are directly involved with the study.

Reimbursement or Compensation:
I have been told that I will not receive compensation in the form of money or any other type as a result of participation in this study.

Participants Concerns:

I have been told that I have the right to contact the primary researcher or her advisor if I have questions or concerns about my participation in this study. I may contact the primary researcher, M. Diana Ming in writing at 260W. 52ND Street, Apt. 28C, New York, N.Y. 10019 or by email: diming47@hotmail.com or by mobile phone (917) 837-9904 or Dr. Sylvia Gonzalez, Advisor, at Andrews University, School of Education, Bell Hall Suite #173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104 or by phone at (269) 471-6702.

Informed Consent:
I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. I understand that I have the right to ask questions of the primary researcher before agreeing to participate in this study. Any questions I had about the study or my participation have been answered to my satisfaction. My signature below acknowledges my consent to voluntarily participate in this research study. If I have additional questions or concerns, I may contact M. Diana Ming, 260W. 52nd Street, Apt 28C, New York, N.Y. 10019 at 917-837-9904.

Copy of Consent Form:
I have been told that I have the right to receive a copy of the consent form for this study. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

Signatures:

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____
Witness Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TO RECAP: You have given your consent to be interviewed for this study by signing a consent form—is that correct? Have you been told of the purpose of this study and how we will proceed throughout? NOW WE ARE READY

INTRODUCTION:

Professional life—Society rights off children they know parents are incarcerated.

Children of prisoners—not every child follows the path of a wayward, incarcerated parent.

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?—Why do we have some resilient children who make it?—these children do not fall victim to criminal behavior like their parents.

That's why you are here . . . to share your story . . . give your perceptions and say how you feel about your experience with having a parent locked-up and physically separated from you.

You are one of thousands of children

- You have experienced in your childhood a parent arrested and imprisoned
- You have avoided criminal behavior
- You graduated from high school

The interviews will often take about 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

<u>Warm-Up Purposes:</u>

"Who" or "When" questions

When did you know that your parent was in prison? Did it make a difference in your life right away or did time pass and then you felt the sting of incarceration?

Who was your caregiver after your parent was incarcerated?

The interviewer now continues by going on and asking follow-up interview Questions below.

These questions may vary or seem similar so the interviewer must make sure that the participant thinks through each question and sees it as a separate inquiry.

1. What does being a "child of parental incarceration mean to you?

____The interviewer wants the participant to express any feelings that he or she attributes to being a child of a prisoner (s).

What was the first feeling you remember after the separation due to parental incarceration?

Would you describe your relationship with that parent (s) in your childhood? It would be helpful if you could start from as far back as possible in the separation period.

2. Choose five words that give the clearest picture of your relationship with your incarcerated parent during your childhood. I will give you a minute or two to think and then, I am going to ask you why you have chosen those particular words. An interested silence is warranted at this junction.

3. LET'S KEEP REFLECTING . . .

What is your memory of your home environment after the event of your parent arrested and incarcerated? Who told you and how long after the incarceration were you told? Was there disruption in your life—**for instance**—did you have to move?—did you go live with someone else?—were you separated from your siblings---Was there an erosion of the life you knew? Was there a financial crisis or hardship at anytime due to that one parent locked-up? Can you remember how you felt at the time?

4. What was your most helpless time?

Example---Seeing the arrest---not knowing what happened to that parent---or the separation itself—how long was your parent in prison?

5. Did you ever FEEL LESS THAN--identify with the criminal elements because of your parents?
____Can you remember any emotional and psychological pain that made you feel stigmatized or isolated from the wider society?

____Tell me about your school life.

6. How did your perception of your life affect your development and decision-making choices?

7. What would you suggest to a child who has a parent in the criminal justice system in paths to pursue in order to have a successful life?

Let the participant respond freely to this question.

8. Tell me about a time in your childhood when you were especially discouraged and how did you pull yourself out of it.

____Let the participant respond freely to this question. Allow the participant thinking time.
Ask for specific details of the time and the steps taken to pull out of this feeling? Why did it happen at that particular time? Now, keep silent.

9. Please share to what do you contribute your success?

____Who or what was present in your life that made a difference in how you would survive the trauma and how you would see yourself in light of having a parent (s) behind bars?

10. How do you think your overall childhood experiences during parental incarceration have affected the quality of your resilience as you adapted?

11. Describe your successes.

____How do you measure success? What did it mean to you to be successful in school? Write three things on a piece of paper that motivated you to find success in school. For the current children of parental incarceration, if you had the opportunity to help them by telling your story over and over in high schools, what would you include in your message of hope to help these young people avoid pitfalls and learn how to become successful and emotionally healthy?

12. Describe what you longed for the most when your parent was incarcerated.

13. What have you taken away from your experience of having a parent (s) incarcerated?
____Lessons learned

____How do you see yourself now?
____What's the most ambitious thing you want to do?
____What's your expectations of your parent who went to prison now?
____What matters to you—what are you holding onto—Example . . . love for the parent, etc.

____Are there any other aspects of your childhood experiences that you think might have helped your successful development? Do you like how you turned out? Does one person stand out or feel like a hero to you in light of your positive journey over the years? What advice do you have for us that we could pass-on to research scholars and educational practitioners in the publication of this study?

Summary:
The purpose of the interview questions was to have you talk about your perceptions about experiencing parental incarceration during childhood and what can make it better for all children of prisoners. Your willingness to reflect and give the best possible answers about childhood experiences that led to your resilience and successful achievements will surely help struggling children who find themselves left behind due to parental imprisonment. Is

there anything we should have talked about and failed to do so? Have we overlooked anything important to your resilience and success?

This ends your participation in this study.
I appreciate the time and effort you put into it and let me assure you that
I recognize the value of your participation and I thank you.

REFERENCE LIST

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M. Diana Ming

Education

Northern Caribbean University (Formerly West Indies College)	1969	3-Year Teacher Diploma
Atlantic Union College	2002	B.A. General Studies
Atlantic Union College	2003	M. Ed Curriculum & Instruction
Andrews University	2005-present	PhD studies in Leadership

Professional Employment

On Site Child Care Centers *Educational Consultant* *2009-Present*

- facilitating in re-organization of program
- on-going consulting of educational issues
- design and implement new curriculum

US Dream Academy *Independent Contractor/Curriculum Specialist* *2005-2008*

- provided leadership for organizational change in academic programming
- designed and implemented curriculum with focus on prisoners' children
- designed and implemented monthly curriculum guides/lesson plans
- part of interview and selection process of professional staff
- conducted in-service training
- assisted in position papers for CEO policy presentation to Congress

Educational Consultant Practice		*2003-2005*
Salvation Army Afterschool Program	*Director*	*1995-1997*
Martin Luther King Jr. Youth Center	*Head Teacher/Programmer*	*1991-1994*
Bishop Spencer Public School	*Teacher*	*1970-1972*
Bermuda Institute	*elem./H.S. Teacher*	*1969 1970*

Professional Certification

Seventh-day Adventist Teacher Certification Atlantic Union, Lancaster, MA

Professional Affiliations

PI Lambda Theta
American Educational research Association (AERA)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
The national Association of professional Women (NAPW)

Field of Interest

Inequality, elevated risk children/African-American prisoners' children, family, religion